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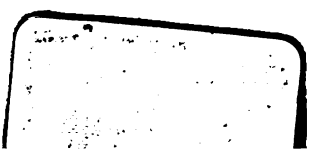
MARGARET'S ENEMY



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MARGARET'S ENEMY.

CHAPTER I.

AN AUSTRALIAN HOME.

"THAT is now the third time that you've jumped up and run out within the very last hour, Pauline. If you cannot settle down more soberly, my dear, your outfit will never be finished."

The person spoken to, a young girl of some fifteen or sixteen years of age, looked up penitently. "I am very sorry, mother dear; but really

now, this perpetual sewing is so tiring. I only ran out to speak to poor Lady Bess, as she went by with the boys. I've not been near her for a couple of days, and she misses me as much as I do her. If I were only on her back now, for a good gallop round! Heigho, if I only could manage my needle as well as the reins! but it really in my fingers seems the silliest, most useless little instrument."

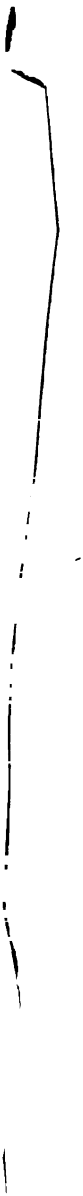
"Patience, darling; you are doing wonders, I am sure."

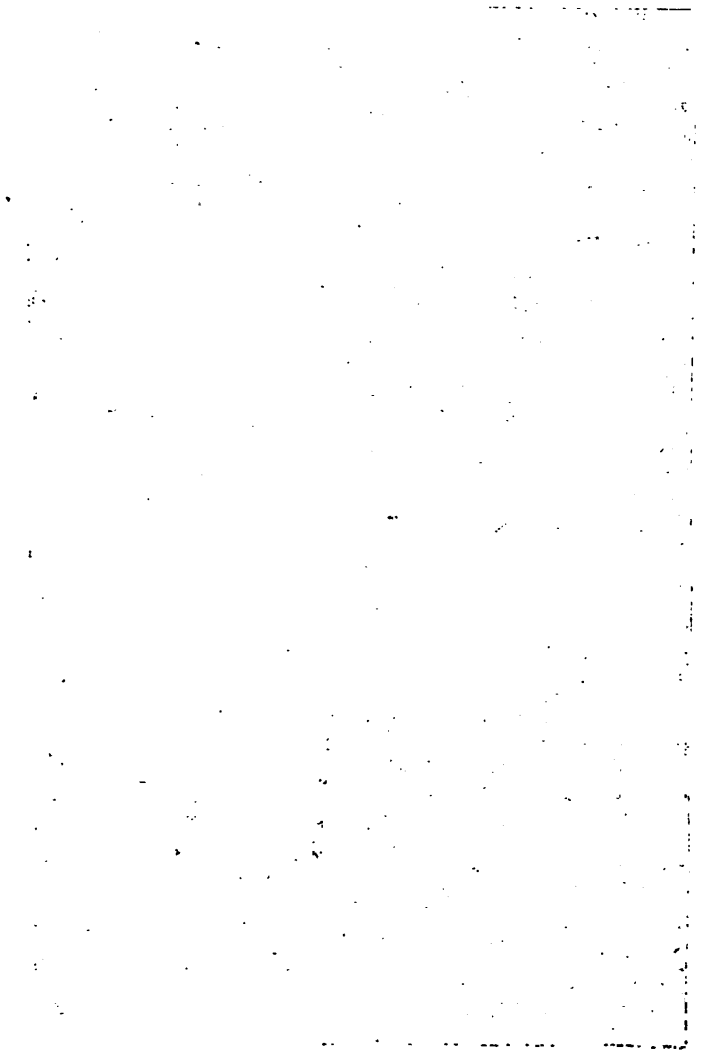
"No, no, mother, I'm very stupid; but I mean to have patience. If I were not patient I should not be a worthy daughter of yours."

The girl glanced up as she spoke with a look of almost adoring tenderness at her mother.

"I shall soon be able to sit down with you," the elder lady returned. "Your father will not be home till sunset, and we can have a long day, when I have just seen that the bread is rising properly, and everything is in order."

As Pauline's unaccustomed fingers laboriously plied her needle there came to her ears from distant parts of the house the sound of her mother's voice, always sweet, refined, and gentle, although it was giving orders about baking, churning, poultry-feeding, and twenty other matters, many of them unknown in an English household. To Pauline, who had never known any other music, that low melodious voice was the most delightful sound; there was nothing she loved better





(See p. 440.)

MARGARET'S ENEMY.

BY

MADELINE BONAVIA HUNT,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE HINGES," "LITTLE EMPRESS JOAN," ETC.

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than to hear her mother singing a refractory child to sleep. She would stand afar off and listen, sighing for the wonderful power of music, which had never entered into her life, and which she only realised from her mother's vivid description.

"Here I am at last," Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed, entering the long low kitchen an hour or so later in the morning, and bearing with her an old-fashioned, well-stocked workbox. "You look very comfortable, dear," and so, indeed, Pauline did, sitting by an open window draped over with luxuriant trailing plants, through which the sunbeams gleamed, dancing on her fair hair and calico gown. "A pretty picture for a mother's eyes!" Mrs. Hamilton reflected with loving pride.

"And now we must set about this wonderful dressing-gown," she said, taking down from the shelf of a deep cupboard in a remote corner of the long room a roll of pretty printed cambric. "I could wish I had some notion of how such garments are made in these days, but I dare say there is not much change in them. Fortunately I have the faded remnants of one in the chest up stairs as a guide. It was one of the things I brought here twelve years ago, and is of genuine London manufacture. You may run into my room and fetch it. It is nearly at the bottom of the chest."

Pauline went off briskly, and presently returned bearing a garment which had once been of pale, delicate pink, but had now become of a yellowish hue. It was nevertheless an object of considerable admiration to

Pauline, who spread it out and eyed the satin trimming with great pride.

"How lovely you must have looked in all those pretty things you used to wear, mother dear!" she exclaimed admiringly. "How I should have loved to hear you playing your beautiful music, and see you in those delightful dresses father tells us about!" and Pauline glanced a little impatiently at the plain, homely gown her mother wore.

"My darling, those things are not necessary to my happiness," Mrs. Hamilton replied. "It is only because your father values them that I ever think of them. To please him I would have them if I could; but I cannot, and it does not fret me in the least."

"Do you know, dear, it strikes me I shan't a bit know what to do with that wonderful gown when I get it. A calico jacket would be much less trouble," Pauline remarked thoughtfully.

"Calico jackets are not known in England," Mrs. Hamilton replied, smiling; "and you have no notion of what school-girls are. You will have plenty of criticism of your ways and belongings; that is why I have been so anxious to give you as much idea as I could of ordinary English life."

"Well, I'm sure my gown must be admired. I think father showed most excellent taste when he chose that; don't you?"

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Hamilton replied, with a momentary sigh, as her mind ran over the poor, scanty

wardrobe her most loving efforts could secure to her child. With money a scarce commodity, and shops more than forty miles off, the preparation of a young lady's outfit was no light matter.

But the mother was too unselfish to let her young daughter's mind imbibe her own apprehensions; and, after all, she reflected, her loved one would be as much as ever—nay, more, when removed from a mother's fostering care—under the protection of a Father whose presence was always near.

"I mean to do such great things when I get to this wonderful England," Pauline rejoined gaily, noting her mother's expression. "You don't know what great projects I have in my mind. It is something more than my poor neglected education that makes me so anxious to go."

"I so wish you might have gone as a pupil only," Mrs. Hamilton continued; "I am afraid my poor Pauline will find school-life rather hard. There is one thing to be thankful for. You have not run quite so wild as you might have done, and teaching the little ones has all been good training for you."

"And here come those same little ones for their dinner," Pauline remarked, jumping up briskly and folding up her work as a preliminary step to laying the cloth with cold meat, bread, and cold fruit pie, which, on account of the needlework, were to furnish the mid-day meal.

The kitchen door was thrown wide open to admit

four children ranging in age from five years up to thirteen. The little girls' brown faces peeped out from large calico bonnets, while the boys wore a peculiar kind of calico hat, admirably contrived to shelter them from the burning sun. They were all clad in simple washing garments, evidently with a view to comfort rather than style. All were of the plainest description; and, indeed, there was something about their general appearance that was quite unlike the English children of these days. Yet no one could mistake these children for anything but what they were, brown-faced and quaintly clad though they might be. In the clear-cut delicate features, the gentle manners, as much as in the neatly-fashioned and scrupulously-kept clothing, there was every evidence of a refined influence.

They were having holiday this fine day—another result of the bustle of preparation for Pauline's departure—and had been out playing about somewhere on the farm among the unfelled trees.

"And here is twelve o'clock, and the gown only cut out," sighed Pauline. "Now, if we had only got one of those wonderful machines that do the sewing! Father really ought to get you one when he comes with me to Melbourne."

"I think father will have enough on his hands on that occasion," Mrs. Hamilton replied; "he has to buy so many things for his daughter before he bids her farewell."

With plenty of cheerful conversation, and no con-

temptible amount of industry, the day wore away, bringing the hour of sunset, and with it Mr. Hamilton, who had been inspecting a distant part of the farm, on which the sheep were reared. The homestead itself consisted of a dairy and produce farm, very like a small English one, but the sheep-run was a vast expanse of pasture land, extending for several miles.

* * * * *

The day had at last arrived when Pauline was to leave the only home she had ever known, and to venture forth into the world which was as a great untrodden dreamland to her—dazzling and bewildering, yet not without a powerful fascination, which helped to bear her through the sad parting from her dearly-loved mother and the children.

In Melbourne they were to stay a night, obtain various requisites, and go down to the ship the next evening, when Pauline would have to say her last farewell.

Not till that moment arrived did she realise the parting. While she was sitting by her father's side in the rough bullock dray, jogging along behind the gaunt oxen, the world beyond did not seem at all an unpleasant sort of place; nor, indeed, did it when they entered the wonderful city, and its glories burst for the first time on Pauline's bewildered eyes. Only when she had set her foot on board, and her father's voice, trembling with emotion, was uttering the last words of farewell and blessing, did Pauline begin to dream that the world might, after all,

be dark and dreary. Its rosy hues had suddenly faded, and the girl's heart sank like lead when her father's arms were no longer round her, his voice no longer sounding in her ears. Something like the dread feeling of death came over her, numbing her faculties to all sensations except those of heartache and desperate longing.

CHAPTER II.

MISS WALMER'S BOARDERS.

"HERE comes Margaret," said one of a group of girls seated round a rapidly-dying school-room fire.

The classes were all over, the day girls were gone. The boarders were supposed to be industriously preparing lessons and exercises for the next day; but the light had departed, and not unwillingly they had grouped themselves round the fire. There was yet three-quarters of an hour before the tea-bell would ring and the school-room be finally vacated, for the term had only just commenced, and the days were still short.

As Margaret entered the room the girls stayed their conversation and turned towards her.

"Anything the matter?" asked one, for Margaret had been sent for and there was no telling what that might mean.

"Only a hamper from home," she replied; "and Miss Walmer wished me to open it in her presence. Such tyranny!"

"And did you?" asked several.

"Of course not," Margaret replied, with a contemptuous toss of her head. "Now mark, girls, how I managed Miss Walmer, and take a lesson from me in getting your own way, as you know I generally do. Susy Fletcher or Marian Newbold would have lost their temper, and been rude—succeeded in obtaining, not their own way, but a charming imposition, such as Miss Walmer delights in. Phyllis, or Edith, or Janie would have meekly given in; but not Margaret Crawford. Why, girls, I was hurt at the suggestion, grievously hurt. I said nothing, but I looked what I felt, and I could hardly keep myself from crying"—here Margaret illustrated her words by assuming an expression of wounded integrity, dropping the corners of her mouth, and veiling her eyes with their lids and heavy lashes.

It was almost too dark to see the full effect, but probably the girls were already acquainted with it, for several of them laughed heartily.

"Presently Miss Walmer said, 'Well, Margaret, if I trust you I hope my confidence will not be abused. You know my wishes—that the proper meals should not be interfered with,' and then, without more ado, she allowed me to take the hamper to my room."

Here Margaret seated herself on the floor in the middle of the group, and unbuckling a school satchel,

"JANIE . . . RECEIVED HERS IN SILENCE" (p. 21).

revealed to the delighted eyes of the girls various inviting-looking little cakes, which she proceeded to distribute all round.

Janie Denton, a quiet little brown-haired girl, received hers in silence, and left it lying in her lap. She looked up hesitatingly once or twice in Margaret's face, and presently remarked, timidly—

"Is it right, Margaret?"

"You silly little thing!" answered Margaret, pityingly; "Miss Walmer put me on my honour not to interfere with our regular meals, and that's all we're concerned with. I'll undertake that my cake won't interfere with my tea."

Janie seemed a little doubtful about the matter, but seeing the others enjoying their unexpected treat, she gradually overcame her scruples, and enjoyed hers too.

"And if we do save a few slices of Miss Walmer's bread-and-scrape—I beg her pardon, I mean, butter," Margaret added, with an expressive grimace—"shan't we be doing her a kindness? To my mind it seems a noble, disinterested deed to eat cake before tea instead of after."

"Wouldn't Pauline enjoy one of these lovely little cakes for her tea!" suggested Janie, looking remorsefully on the small piece left in her hand. "If I'd only thought of that before!"

"I dare say Margaret has some more," suggested Phyllis Mercer.

"I may have, and I may not," Margaret remarked

haughtily. "Anyhow, they are too good to waste on a silly little thing who never has anything to give any one. No doubt there are plenty of things in the hamper that will do for *her*."

"I wish I had saved mine," Janie remarked, by way of protest, for she was considerably afraid of Margaret, and had no desire for a battle-royal with her. The other girls shrugged their shoulders in expressive silence.

"It's all very well," continued Margaret, no whit abashed, "every one of you girls has the same thought in the bottom of your hearts, only you won't own it, even to yourselves. We are all very proper, good girls," she continued mockingly; "we never think anything that isn't extremely praiseworthy, we wouldn't for worlds. It's very nice to be such a pattern set as we are, a sweet little group of Pharisees. However, I know I'm not of the good sort, but I'll be honest, and not pretend to the sweet sentiments which flourish in this superior establishment."

Margaret's oratory fell upon her hearers with various effects. Most of the girls admired it, not the less because Margaret was a tall, handsome girl with dark bright eyes, and a face whose varying expression lent additional effect to her words. Perhaps some element of truth touched home. Janie sat thoughtfully a few minutes. She was wondering whether anywhere in her heart, unknown to herself, there did lurk a contempt for Pauline, who was on such a different footing from themselves. But she felt very sure there did not, and that she

would really and honestly have felt far happier if she had given Pauline that delicious cake, and had had none herself.

She felt that it was her duty to Pauline to say so, and did so, not without a little quaking at her own temerity in being the only one to take up the cudgels against such a powerful adversary.

"My dear child," said Margaret, in a tone of quiet contempt, "every observer of character is able to read such a weak little mind as yours. There is no character so self-deceptive as one of your class; you are no more able to tell what is in your own mind than what is in mine. It is also one of the points of weak minds to be obstinate. You take up Pauline because she is the only girl here weaker than yourself. Of course you don't think that is the reason, but it is, I can assure you. Do beg your parents to let you include the study of human nature among the various branches of your English education, and begin upon yourself."

Janie did not venture any reply to this tirade. She was wise enough to know that it was no use trying to match her powers against Margaret's; she who was generally acknowledged to be "not clever," while Margaret was considered the brightest girl in the school. But Janie was an honest, straightforward little body, with a keen desire to do right; and the sharp, stinging words of the clever girl had dropped upon her tender heart like atoms of fire, leaving her too wounded to speak or do anything but struggle with all her might against the

sobs which threatened to burst out, and which she knew so well would render her more than ever contemptible in the eyes of her schoolfellows.

How readily would she have rushed out of the room up to Pauline, had she dared run the gauntlet of ridicule which the girls would have heaped upon her for being baby-hearted! Where are there to be found greater tyrants, more unmerciful tormentors, than school-girls are to each other?

In the matter of Pauline, the other girls could not very well go against Margaret. Miss Walmer's establishment was very select, consisting only of six boarders, whose parents paid extremely well for the privilege of placing their daughters there. Pauline had come among them as a governess pupil, and bearing all the marks of narrow means and a straitened home. The well-to-do boarders chose to take affront. In the first place Pauline made seven, and although it was nothing whatever to do with them, they considered this a grievance. Then several of them, led by Margaret, pronounced Pauline "dowdy," and declared that her home-made garments, and thick, mended boots, were a disgrace to the school. Margaret openly pronounced her "a little plebeian, with neither brains nor beauty to recommend her;" and Marian wondered what business she had with such an ill-fitting name as Pauline. Janie alone had held aloof, but no one expected Janie to pronounce an opinion, for they did not believe her capable of forming one. Moreover,

she was the youngest of the boarders, and the elder ones kept her well in order.

At tea-time Margaret appeared behind the others bearing a large loaf of gingerbread cake.

"I am glad to see," Miss Walmer remarked, "that you have restrained your impatience until the proper moment."

Margaret made no reply. One or two of her companions were for a moment inclined to blush, but only Janie looked really uncomfortable. "I wish I hadn't done it," she was thinking to herself. "For all Margaret says, it wasn't quite right."

"Mademoiselle returns to-morrow," Miss Walmer presently announced. "She is, I am glad to hear, quite well again. I trust you have spent the hour in just the same manner without her presence as you would have done had she been with you."

"We have spent it charmingly," replied Margaret, with assumed deference. "We have been having a discussion on various phases of human nature, and were so interested that we hardly knew how the time went."

"Very profitable," Miss Walmer returned. Like many others, she had a great admiration for Margaret's supposed brilliant intellect, and had not yet learnt all the coils of the girl's character. But she had more than a suspicion that among her other talents she had cultivated the one of taking very good care of herself—that is, of studying to appear in the right light on all occasions. This, indeed, was but a suspicion on Miss Walmer's

part, for she had never been able to prove anything against the girl. Her lessons, indeed, were the best in the school, her marks and general work as satisfactory as any, her conduct, so far as it came under the governess's notice, affording no ground for displeasure, although Miss Walmer had a sort of instinctive feeling that there was a nameless something she did not like—a hidden contempt, a veiled sarcasm, which Margaret cleverly contrived should wound with a touch that was scarcely felt or seen. And, strangely enough, although not one of the girls would have told tales about Margaret's many questionable proceedings, there was not one who really entertained for her the warm friendship which often begins in school-days and lasts through life.

Margaret's gingerbread loaf was cut, after a due proportion of wholesome fare in the shape of bread-and-butter had been consumed. Very graciously she requested that she might be allowed to send the first piece up to Pauline.

Miss Walmer's consent was readily given, and Janie volunteered for the office of cake-bearer.

Margaret cut a large slice and gave it to the delighted Janie, who ran upstairs with it as fast as she was able under the circumstances.

CHAPTER III.

PAULINE'S FRIEND.

JANIE did not wait for the formality of tapping at Pauline's door, but, sure of welcome, went straight in, careful, however, to enter softly, in case of finding her friend asleep.

Pauline was sitting up in bed, making laudable efforts to eat her way through a slice of somewhat tough toast. A cup of tea, rapidly growing cold, stood on a little table by the bedside. It was evident that Pauline had no great disposition to eat or drink.

"Do you feel better to-night?" Janie asked, critically eyeing the invalid.

"Yes, dear, thank you," she replied; "I am no longer in the burning fever I have been. My throat is still very painful, and I feel tired and weak; but it will soon be right, I dare say. The worst of it is, I know I

"PAULINE WAS SITTING UP IN BED" (p. 27).

must eat to get strong, and yet I can't manage it, however much I try."

"Margaret has sent you some lovely gingerbread. It's come from home, and is in a loaf, not at all like the shop gingerbread!" exclaimed Janie enthusiastically.

"It's very good of Margaret," Pauline replied, with a grateful smile, "but I'm afraid gingerbread is not quite in my way just now."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Janie returned regretfully, "I thought you'd enjoy it so. Oh, dear, how I wish I could bring you a little delicate golden cake that seemed to melt in your mouth, and hardly to want any biting or swallowing at all."

"Such a cake as that," replied Pauline, smiling, "if it were in existence, would be the cake of all others for me."

"It is in existence—at least, it was," Janie exclaimed remorsefully. "To think of my eating it! I do wonder whether Margaret has any more."

"Never mind, dear; very likely if you brought it me I shouldn't fancy it, after all," Pauline replied gratefully. "But tell me how things are going on."

"Oh, much the same as usual," Janie replied; "Margaret is first in almost everything, of course. Pauline," she said, suddenly, and with a decision very unusual with Janie, "I don't like Margaret. I believe she does us all harm. All she says about being honest and straightforward, and not being afraid to say what she thinks, is hard-heartedness, I feel that it is," and here soft-hearted Janie gave vent to her wounded feelings by a burst of real tears.

"See how disdainful she is to you," sobbed Janie. "How do you stand it, I wonder?"

"I stand it because I have a purpose in remaining here," Pauline replied, quietly. "You know, Janie, bright, clever people, like Margaret, fancy that quiet ones like you and I can neither feel nor understand,

therefore they go to greater lengths than they would otherwise. That is how I excuse Margaret, but I will not deny that she has made me feel very unhappy at times."

"I know it; I can always see," cried Janie, with the utmost sympathy. "But we won't talk about it. I shall have to go directly. Let me make you more comfortable; and, oh! do you think you could eat grapes, or what? Do tell me, there's a dear. I really must go, or I shall get into trouble. I'd really forgotten that we hadn't begun tea."

So Janie reluctantly hastened away, leaving Pauline for another weary while to herself and her own thoughts.

Miss Walmer was kind, but illness at school is not altogether a pleasant matter, and though Pauline's ailment was only one of her ulcerated throats, still it was quite bad enough to make her feel low-spirited and miserable. It had been worse than usual this time, accompanied with a great deal of fever, which Miss Walmer, with considerable skill, had managed to conquer. Eating was still a most painful operation, and with absolutely no appetite, the best will in the world could not be expected to achieve much. With all her other duties Miss Walmer could only give an occasional five minutes to Pauline, who was grateful for being allowed to stay in the house, when, as Miss Walmer knew, there was no chance of her paying anything extra. But it was not the discomfort or loneliness of illness

under such circumstances that was weighing on Pauline's spirits. She was losing time, which was so precious to her, and she was wondering, too, whether Miss Walmer would repent her agreement when she found her governess pupil a burden on her hands like this, for Pauline greatly feared that this was not likely to be the only time she would be laid up in a similar way. She had lost the buoyant health she had known in her native climate, when all her time had been spent in such boisterous outdoor exercise as few girls dream of. This new life of confinement, and routine, and hard study, was strange and irksome; but worse than all, it seemed positively to have changed her from a sturdy, healthy lass, into a sickly, spiritless school-girl. "Yet not spiritless," Pauline added to herself, with a flash of energy, "for I am determined to carry out my purpose in spite of everything, if it is anyway possible to do it."

While Pauline's tired head was exercised with many a worrying problem the girls were at tea, and Janie was screwing up her resolution to do what she would never have done for herself—ask a favour of Margaret.

When, therefore, the meal was concluded, and the girls were preparing to busy themselves with such lessons as remained unlearned, she timidly approached Margaret, and drawing her aside, gave her a graphic description of Pauline's state, and gently intimated that the little golden cakes, to which Margaret had that

afternoon treated them, were the ones of all others to tempt the invalid.

"Come along," Margaret replied, "I'll give you one."

Janie followed, delighted with her success. Miss Walmer's permission having been given, they proceeded upstairs to Margaret's room, where that young lady placed in Janie's hands one out of a dozen or so, which lay temptingly folded in a snowy damask cloth. Janie caught sight of grapes and oranges.

"Pauline would like some of those," she exclaimed excitedly.

"Does Pauline give you half of everything?" Margaret asked, half sneeringly.

Janie said no more. Not even for Pauline's sake could she have begged another dainty. It was hard enough to take the little cake. "And Margaret is called generous," she said to herself, angrily. "Generous, indeed! Only when it suits her to be so. What generosity is there in giving that you may gain! I'll shame her. I'll show her how dreadfully mean she really is," were Janie's thoughts, as she departed with her hardly-earned treasure, which Pauline ate and enjoyed.

When Janie's lessons were despatched, she wrote the following little note:—

"DEAR KIND MAMMA,—Send me a little hamper of the very nicest things you can think of for some one who is ill and has no appetite, and is very weak. Please let me have it as soon

as ever it is possible to get the things, and let it be instead of the two hampers you generally send me during the term. I am sure you will not disappoint your loving daughter, JANIE."

Janie had not "reckoned without her host." Two days later her hamper arrived, just as the girls were assembling for tea, and Janie was given permission to open it there and then, while her schoolfellows watched with ill-concealed interest.

A little note gave a list of the contents. "Oh, how lovely!" Janie exclaimed, clapping her hands. "Oranges, grapes, moulded sponge cake, one of mamma's famous beef jellies, beautifully firm, in a mould, two bottles of port, a plum cake (that's no good), and a turkey."

"But, my dear," Miss Walmer exclaimed, somewhat mystified, "what can you want with a turkey and two bottles of port wine?"

Janie turned the paper over, glancing rather uncomfortably at the fat turkey lying topmost, but her face presently brightened. "Ask Miss Walmer to accept a turkey out of our yard," she read out, "and your invalid schoolfellow, who is so far from all her friends, some of papa's wonderful invalid port."

"And all the other things will just do beautifully for Pauline," Janie continued enthusiastically, "except perhaps this plum cake." And then Janie laughed softly to herself as she thought how cleverly her mamma had managed the whole matter, so that neither Pauline nor Miss Walmer could feel hurt.

The plum cake was placed in all its tempting beauty

on the table for general distributi
made a selection of dainties for
needs. These, with the assistanc
were carried up stairs, and poured
reckless profusion.

"There are heaps more," Janie
ment. "Eat those as fast as yo
Papa has sent you two bottles of
your friends are so far away, and
best medicine in the world for a b
of mamma to guess who my invalid
"So now, dear, you really must be
then Janie darted away, for fear, a
Pauline might think she wanted to

The only vacant chair happene
not a favourite place with Janie, but
quietly. Miss Walmer had retired
on the arrival of a visitor, and Mad
returned on the previous day, was in
Unfortunately, Mademoiselle's auth
great. Her imperfect knowledge
inexperience, for she was but youn
repugnance to complain to Miss Wal
of discipline, were all taken the utmo
the girls, who daringly carried on th
of school-girl life under her very nose.

conspiracies

While Janie was peaceably munching a slice of thick bread-and-butter, and pondering agreeably on the fact that Pauline must enjoy some of that delicate

e cake, the very thing for an invalid, she was ous of a small piece of paper being pushed on to ap underneath the table. Janie's eyes strayed rch of it, when she perceived something written argaret's bold characteristic handwriting. With difficulty she read, "Janie's text for to-morrow, n thankful I am not as these other girls are, nor as this Margaret, &c. &c.'"

anie flushed crimson. The thrust told home, argaret had known it would. Janie knew very that she had requested the hamper as much to e Margaret as to benefit Pauline. She saw it now distinctly, and could not in honesty defend herself. ly all her pleasure was gone, for Janie, with all her , and of course she had plenty, was naturally ed to be genuine in thought and word, and, ver, of a sensitive disposition that found the st pain in having *deserved* reproof.

argaret was supremely sweet-tempered and affable nie for the rest of the evening, but the little w and understood the slight smile about eyes outh, which seemed to her so full of stinging pt.

m that day Margaret bestowed upon Janie the nickname of Fairy, which, as she was small and fair, was deemed very appropriate, and was rapidly taken up by the others. No one but Janie suspected the real meaning of the name, not even when on her birthday she received from Margaret a beautifully-bound birthday

book, on the fly-page of which was elaborately illuminated, with scrolls and other fanciful designs, "Phari, from her friend Margaret."

"I like to be original in all things," Margaret exclaimed gaily, as the book was passed round, "even in the spelling of a nickname."

CHAPTER IV.

PAULINE'S LITTLE MYSTERY.

WHETHER the invalid port had anything to do with it I will not undertake to say, but before many days had passed, Pauline made her appearance once more in the schoolroom. No one except Janie suspected how really ill she had been. Even Miss Walmer said to herself, "Pauline gives way, she must not be encouraged." And her illness was talked of somewhat very disparagingly as "only a sore throat," which plainly proved that neither Miss Walmer nor the girls had any experience of how really ill a sore throat could make one.

Under these circumstances, her return amongst them was not hailed with the congratulations which such an event generally called forth, and Pauline, who was still very weak, as her pale face and heavy eyes plainly

showed, felt very keenly this omission, nor was her re-appearance rendered any more welcome by Miss Walmer's remark, when school hours were over, that as she wished to consult with Mademoiselle, she would request Pauline to remain in charge until tea-time, and hold her responsible for the orderliness and general good behaviour of the girls.

It was a hard task for Pauline, scarcely older than the other girls themselves, and one which she knew rendered her intolerable in their eyes. In many of the classes she joined them as one of themselves, and she knew very well they would not willingly yield her any authority over them.

However, for the present they were engrossed with various exercises, and Pauline, seated at the head of the school desk in her position as governess, pursued the preparation of the next day's German without let or hindrance.

Presently Margaret shut up her books, and exclaimed, "I am going to write some letters."

Pauline, engrossed in her own work, did not notice the remark; but Janie did, and interpreted it as a challenge. To take up any other employment during the preparation hour without permission was always accounted a breach of discipline.

"I had a letter from home this morning," Margaret continued, in a low tone to her special companion Marian. "Trissy says that Lady Monteith is fearfully angry with me for not having written yet."

Pauline looked up quickly. "Lady Monteith—who is she?"

"A near neighbour of ours," Margaret replied coldly, as if to say, "What can it matter to you?" Then Margaret continued in an undertone to Marian, "You know I am a great favourite with the old lady. I spend most of the holidays with her, and she has just the loveliest house you can imagine. She is a queer, cross-grained old lady; but somehow I like her, and she likes me. I do think I've taken more pains to make myself agreeable to her than I have ever done with anybody else in my life."

Pauline's face flushed painfully. "I must request you not to talk, Margaret," she said gently. "What are you doing? Writing letters? Oh! you know you should not have put aside your exercises to do that."

"They are important," said Margaret shortly.

"Then you should have asked permission," Pauline replied deprecatingly. "I must ask you to put them aside till your exercises are finished."

"I should not think of doing such a thing," Margaret replied, promptly, continuing to write. "You are perfectly welcome to report me to Miss Walmer."

Now this was just what Pauline was not likely to do, first, because a system of telling tales would, she knew, make her utterly obnoxious to the girls as one of themselves, and secondly, because by doing so she would only have invited unpleasant comment from Miss

Walmer on her own incapacity. That she must manage by herself she felt quite sure.

"Margaret, you know that is taking a mean advantage of me. I appeal to your sense of honour," Pauline urged.

"Please don't do that," Margaret replied coolly.

"Oh, Margaret, how can you?" burst in Janie, who had been listening in a state of the greatest excitement.

"Hold your tongue, Fairy," replied Margaret, with considerable emphasis on the last word. "This matter does not concern you."

"It does concern me," Janie continued, excitedly, unable any longer to restrain her indignation. "Pauline has never done you any harm. Why should you treat her like that? You are the hardest-hearted *thing* I ever came near, and the meanest, and altogether the most disagreeable. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

As ill-fortune would have it, Miss Walmer entered the room just as Janie, looking as fiery as possible, was concluding her angry remarks.

Margaret sat smiling, quietly contemptuous.

"What is all this?" she asked, in surprise.

"I wished to write a very important letter," Margaret explained, "and Pauline forbade me to do it. Janie chose to be indignant because I told Pauline I must write it."

"You were very wrong to use the word 'must' about it," Miss Walmer said, reprovingly, and then

"MISS WALMER ENTERED THE ROOM" (p. 40).

turning to Pauline, she added, quite kindly, "If the letter were important, you might have given permission;" then to Janie, "You cannot be allowed to lose your temper and use such expressions to one of your schoolfellows. I am sorry to have to give you an imposition."

So Margaret got the best of it, and Pauline's heart was not more filled with a stinging sense of injustice than was poor Janie's. It was difficult to repress the rebellious tears that were so ready to overwhelm her. If her companions could have known the feeling of lonely desolation and oppression that was weighing upon the poor girl's heart, they would surely have pitied her; but Pauline did not wear her heart on her sleeve, so people were apt to forget that she had one.

None of the girls suspected Pauline of feeling Margaret's piece of rebellion so bitterly as she did. In a day or two the matter was forgotten, except by those most concerned in it.

"Margaret," Pauline remarked one day, when they were alone together for a few minutes, "what sort of an old lady is Lady Monteith?"

Margaret looked at her in surprise.

"Lady Monteith is an aristocratic, haughty old dame, of whom most people are frightened, and who quarrels with everybody. All the people in the place talk about her haughtiness and bad temper, yet every one is civil, and often flattering to her face. She reckons them up, though, and knows very well that it's

only her money and position they admire. She and I get on together splendidly. But what can you know, or what interest can you take in Lady Monteith?" Margaret asked, running her eye critically over Pauline's plain dress, of cheap material, and ungainly make. Then she added, as a light seemed to dawn upon her, "I wouldn't advise any one without plenty of spirit and a determined will (such as mine," she added parenthetically) "to think of being a companion to Lady Monteith—you, of all people."

"I had no thought of offering myself as a companion to Lady Monteith," Pauline replied, with a touch of gentle dignity in her tone. "But I want to ask a favour of you, Margaret. Will you oblige me by never mentioning my name to her, or saying anything about me, good or bad?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot promise; for I have already spoken of you to her, and it is just as likely as not that she might revert to it," Margaret replied. "Do you know her?" she asked, abruptly.

"Know her? I never saw her in my life," Pauline remarked, nervously. "But what did you tell her about me?" she added, with eagerness.

"I think that is rather a foolish question," Margaret replied, somewhat amused at the vein of vanity she thought she had detected. "These quiet girls have a great deal more hidden away than people think," she said to herself, which was very true, though not in the way she meant.

"Well, you know I am candid," Margaret replied, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "At the time you came I mentioned to Lady Monteith, among other things, that Miss Walmer had taken a seventh boarder, although she put on all her prospectuses that her number was limited to six, and that I, for one, was determined to show Miss Walmer that I didn't think it was fair. However, in the holidays Miss Walmer wrote to mamma, telling her under what circumstances you had come, about your being a governess pupil, you know, and I suppose a good deal more about you, for mamma said she was very glad to think Miss Walmer was able to make so kind an arrangement for you. So you see you were talked about a goodish bit. Very likely mamma explained the matter to Lady Monteith, for she asked me what sort of a girl you were, and so on."

"What did you tell her?" asked Pauline, who had listened attentively.

"I told her you had come from an out-of-the-way part of Australia, and hadn't much notion of English life, and that you were one of the people who are born to be put upon," Margaret replied, half banteringly. "You *would* have it, you know!"

"What did she say?" Pauline asked, unheedingly.

"Oh, really, how can I remember, and why should you catechise me?" Margaret returned, impatiently. "I remember she gave me a sharp rap on the knuckles

with a paper-knife, and asked me if I thought I was born to do the 'putting upon?' to which I replied, 'Undoubtedly;' and that, I believe, was the end of it. No! I remember she told me it was a pity I was not more like my mother, which was rather extraordinary, considering that mamma never gets on with her at all. Mamma doesn't like her. If it were not for papa I don't suppose I should be allowed to go there; only, as she is a very valuable patient, they would hardly like to offend her."

"And what is your mamma like?"

"The exact opposite to me," Margaret replied, with some enthusiasm. "Very fair, and very lovely—about the most beautiful fair woman I have ever seen. She is very clever, too, and very good."

"You have drawn a life-like picture," Pauline remarked. "I can almost see her before my eyes."

"Indeed you can't," Margaret returned, in her own abrupt manner. "No one could imagine what she is like without seeing her."

Here the two girls parted, and Pauline, as she went into the class-room to write a letter home, was pondering on the many sides of Margaret's character. But she was called away again, and had to leave her letter lying unfinished on the desk.

Margaret, passing the table, caught sight of the words "Lady Monteith," which so excited her curiosity that she glanced along a line or two, and read, "One of the girls here knows Lady Monteith. The descrip-

tion she gives of her corresponds exactly with what you have told me."

"Now what can this shabby little thing have to do with Lady Monteith?" Margaret pondered. "There is some scheme going on. I shouldn't be at all surprised to find that the girl belongs to a bad set. Who is she? One never hears about her people. No one visits her, and she goes nowhere. Anyhow, I shall warn Lady Monteith."

CHAPTER V.

MARGARET MAKES SOME STARTLING STATEMENTS.

MISS WALMER'S six boarders, together with an odd unit, in the shape of Pauline, were again grouped in their favourite position around the schoolroom fire, and awaiting the summons to tea. Mademoiselle was in charge, but her presence did not place much restriction on the conversation, for her imperfect knowledge of English rendered it very easy to confuse her.

The girls had been talking about home, already counting the weeks and days to the holidays, although only a fortnight of the term had gone. It did not

escape Janie's observation that Pauline looked specially sad at the mention of home; and the little girl slipped her hand into her friend's, to indicate that she sympathised warmly.

Suddenly Margaret turned to Pauline and asked abruptly, "Pauline, what is your home like? You have never told us anything about it. Now a sketch of Australian life would be interesting."

"Yes, do tell as about it," exclaimed several voices.

Janie noticed that the hand lying on hers moved nervously, as if Pauline was distressed.

"I don't think you would find it interesting," she said, evasively.

"I am sure we should," several of the girls protested; while Edith, a little girl with a vivid imagination, asked excitedly, "Used you to ride bare-backed steeds across miles of prairie, through pampas-grass as high as yourself?"

"What a jumble of ideas!" Pauline replied. "No, I never did anything so wonderful as that;" and then Pauline sat looking thoughtful, as she remembered the life she had led at home, and that her mother was still leading—so different from the life of an English lady—with its daily routine of churning and cooking, soap and candle making, and the washing and ironing of linen, or other domestic work; for in that far-off region, miles away from the smallest township or station, every detail of daily life fell to the share of the wife and

mother when help, as was often the case, could not be obtained.

How could Pauline talk to these girls, born and reared in wealthy English homes, about her own home life, without giving them a false impression of the mother who was indeed as truly a lady as their own.

Margaret attributed her silence to another reason, and was even doubting in her own mind whether Pauline's home was in Australia at all.

"Can't you remember something about your childhood?" she said, determined to follow up the subject.

But Pauline was not so obtuse as to be blind to Margaret's purpose, and she was equally determined that Margaret's unwarrantable curiosity should not be gratified.

"I am told that I was scalded when I was a baby," Pauline replied with a quiet smile. "However, I don't remember anything about it."

"What an interesting piece of intelligence!" returned Margaret, eyeing Pauline curiously, and wondering whether she was quite so simple as she looked. "But talking of scalding, when I was about Janie's age I scalded *myself*."

"Not on purpose?" asked one or two of the girls, while Mademoiselle turned up her eyes and exclaimed "Nevaire!"

"Yes, on purpose," Margaret replied, enjoying the sensation her words had created. "I was learning music, and I disliked the drudgery of it. Besides,

mamma plays beautifully, and I knew I should never be able to play as well as she did. I didn't want to learn at all; for what's the use of doing a thing unless you can do it better than other people?"

"But truly," interposed Mademoiselle, who loved an anecdote, and had listened attentively, "you would not think to be jealous of your own mamma when you came to play music to your friends!"

"Yes, I would," said Margaret boldly. "I must be first or nothing, Mademoiselle. Do you understand? I would be jealous of any one who outdid me, no matter who it might be. Do not look shocked. Plenty of others feel the same, only they do not own it."

"Tell us about the scald," urged Marian, impatiently.

"Oh, well, I didn't practise, and my governess said I got on so slowly that I must practise two hours every day. I was determined not to, so I poured a jug of hot water over my right hand."

There were various exclamations of astonishment from the girls.

"I took the jug in my left hand," continued Margaret, enjoying the impression she had made, "and held the right one over the basin. Then I turned my head away and suddenly tipped up the jug. I did it effectually, too, for the pain was so great that I screamed. I have never touched a piano since."

"How was that?" some one asked.

"Well, I suspect that my governess declined to go

on teaching me," laughed Margaret, "and mamma very likely thought that it was not worth while to spend time and money over me. It was quite six months before my hand was well, and I had by then forgotten all I had learned. Mamma told me then that I should not be taught again unless I promised to try; but if I still wished to give it up, I might do so on condition that I should never have another opportunity given me, however much I desired it. I am never likely to wish to break the condition."

"Your story is not good," said Mademoiselle. "No French girl would do anything so barbarous."

"Nor English girl either, I think, except Margaret. I do not think even she can really mean that she was jealous of her own mother. I know Margaret is very fond and proud of her mamma. She told me only yesterday she was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen," said Pauline, hoping to touch the soft spot in the girl's heart that she had betrayed the day before.

"You don't know anything about me," said Margaret, resenting the endeavour to soften down her startling statements just out of mere wilfulness. "The only reason I am not jealous of mamma's beauty is because she is fair and I am dark. I don't like people who stand in my way, and you know, Mademoiselle, we have a proverb that says, 'A good hater is a good lover.'"

"But you do all to dislike, and nevaire to love, I think," said Mademoiselle. "It is a character not

French, but only to find in England. I do not like your England; it is a country very rough and rude." At this there was a general outcry. Even among school-girls the flame of patriotism is to be found very deeply rooted. Mademoiselle defended her beloved France against the indignant protests of every one of the girls, as a country with which England could not be compared.

While the altercation was at its very highest, the school-room maid entered with a summons for Margaret to go to Miss Walmer in her bedroom.

She did not return, and the bell rang for tea fully half an hour later than usual.

"I have a very sad piece of intelligence to impart," Miss Walmer said, as the girls assembled. "Margaret Crawford will be leaving here to-morrow morning, and I fear it may be finally. Her mother died most unexpectedly this morning, and her father naturally wishes to have the comfort of his eldest daughter's presence. I am sure that every one will feel the deepest sympathy with poor Margaret."

The girls looked from one to another in silence. Did more than one of them recall to mind the conversation of scarcely an hour before, in which that mother's name had been so freely mentioned? Pauline did, and it weighed upon her heart like lead. "Poor, poor Margaret," she kept on thinking, "what must she be suffering!" and then bearing in mind the enthusiasm with which the girl had spoken the day before, she felt

that Margaret had done herself an injustice. Pushing away the food that was so distasteful while all her senses were engrossed by the thought of Margaret's trouble, she came round to Miss Walmer's chair, and said, in a low tone, "May I go to her? I think I might be able to comfort her."

CHAPTER VI.

GOOD FOR EVIL.

PAULINE ran quickly upstairs, and softly entered the room which Margaret used exclusively. In the dim light — for Margaret's first action had been to draw the blinds and the thick curtains — she could see Margaret standing erect, with head leant back against the wall. There were no tears upon the girl's face, no sign of grief, indeed, about her, except the hands clasped low, and the darkened room.

She started forward and gazed inquiringly at Pauline as she entered.

"Is it you?" she asked almost fiercely. "What do you want? Have you come to point the moral of

this afternoon's conversation? to seize such an excellent opportunity of showing me what a bad character I am?"

The rebellious tears rose for a moment in Pauline's eyes at this ungracious reception. But it passed quickly through her mind that even such an outburst as this betrayed that remorse, if not some tenderer feeling, lurked beneath that proud, haughty exterior. And Pauline, young as she was, read for herself how, even in moments like this, the natural habit and tone of mind asserted itself, and must be duly allowed for.

"Not for that at all," Pauline said gently, feeling how difficult it was to express what she really would say. "To remind you rather of what you told me yesterday."

"Yesterday!" echoed Margaret, as if trying vainly to recall the circumstance. "I told you several things about yourself that were not very pleasant, but it was your own fault. Have you seized this opportunity to reproach me?"

"No, indeed!" Pauline replied. "I had forgotten all that part of our talk. I was thinking of what you told me about your mother."

"Did I say she was good?" Margaret asked absently.

"You gave me the impression that she was, at any rate," Pauline answered, "and that she was wonderfully beautiful and wonderfully clever," she continued quickly, seizing the opportunity Margaret had given her.

"And so she was," cried Margaret impetuously. "Whatever impression you got of her was not good enough. I have often heard papa say there was no one else like her. What will he do without her, I wonder?"

"He will have you, his eldest daughter," Pauline said very gently.

"Me!" Margaret exclaimed, with a queer sort of laugh. "What good shall I be to him? Do you suppose I can make up for *her?*"

"Yes, a little, perhaps a great deal in time," Pauline said thoughtfully, with a tender recollection of some experiences in her own life.

Again Margaret laughed in her own sarcastic, scornful fashion. "What can you know about it?" she presently asked abruptly, suddenly remembering that this girl who was advising her so sagely was her own schoolfellow, a little, ill-dressed, unstylish creature, whose relations, if not herself, she suspected of being impostors. "My mother visited everywhere, and I have often heard papa say that half his practice was owing to her being so liked and admired," she added with an assumption of dignity that would have made Pauline smile under other circumstances.

"But in the house, among your sisters and brothers, and with your father," Pauline persisted, "by seeing after his comfort in many ways that even a girl of fourteen could easily do, especially one so old for her years as you."

"I wouldn't if I could," burst forth Margaret angrily. "*I* in her place. No one is able or worthy to be in it, and no one shall ever dare to. I will see to that, at any rate. No one but papa shall ever touch the things that she used. No one shall ever sit in her place. It shall be my business to see that they don't."

"Margaret, you must not give all your love to the dead. You must save some for the living. Don't you think *she* would have said so? Perhaps while she was dying she was longing to tell you so. Don't you think it would have made her happier if she had heard you promise to take care of those she was leaving? Did she think of you, do you suppose, and want to see you and speak to you once more?" Pauline asked, half musingly, but more with the desire to touch, if it might be, the gentler side of Margaret's proud, self-reliant nature. "You can never know, but you may pretty well guess. It is all you can do, for she will never speak her wishes to you again."

Margaret's hand went up to her eyes, and was brushed hastily across them. The next moment she had flung herself on the bed, and with head buried in the pillow, gave vent now and again to a great sob.

Presently the tears came thick and fast, and Pauline was half frightened at the storm she had roused. Yet she felt that it was better for Margaret, even though it bruised her spirit and wasted her strength.

She turned the key in the door, and came and stood quietly by the bed, the tears raining down her own face, her sympathetic heart torn by the sight of the girl's despairing woe, for it seemed more than grief that swayed the usually cold, proud nature so completely.

Pauline did what she could. It was her first experience of the kind, and she had only her gentle feminine instinct to guide her. She brought eau-de-cologne and cold water, and bathed Margaret's burning eyes and forehead. Then she covered her over warmly and venturing to press a kiss—the first since they had known each other—on her cheek, left her to herself.

Only for a short time, and in order to execute an idea that had come into her head. Then she returned with some tempting food, which, however, Margaret pushed away with one of her old impatient gestures, though she suffered Pauline to help her to undress, and see her comfortably in bed, before she took her departure.

The first hours of the night passed wearily. Margaret's mind reverted again and again to the picture Pauline had called up, of her mother dying, and wanting her, and there was borne in upon her, as it had not been before, the sad fact, so awful and overwhelming when it first comes home to us, that the face she had last seen in health and beauty she would never see again except cold and white and altered, and that the tones

that were even now ringing in her ears, would never sound more for her. It seemed impossible, and the undisciplined heart was rent by passionate grief at the very unchangeableness of the event which had brought her misery.

When at length she could bear it no longer, and the heavy sobs burst forth again, threatening to choke her, a light hand was laid on hers, and Pauline's voice whispered affectionately in her ear, "Poor, poor Margaret."

"You here!" she exclaimed in surprise, when she had grown calmer, and then her old characteristic intolerance cropping up, as strong characteristics do at the most unseemly times, she remarked, "What an ugly dressing-gown! Do take mine out of the cupboard. I can't bear to see you in that thing."

"You musn't be too contemptuous," Pauline remarked, glancing down at it affectionately. "Mother and I thought a great deal of it when we made it. We had to send fifty miles for the stuff, and then we had to cut it by guess. I thought it a great achievement."

"Are you very fond of your mother?" Margaret asked, abruptly.

"Oh, yes!" Pauline exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"Is that what made you—sorry for me?"

"Yes. I can understand so well, and I am so many hundreds miles from her, and shall not see her

again for years, perhaps. It has seemed sometimes almost as if we were parted for ever."

"I suppose that was when we all snubbed you?" Margaret exclaimed, with a touch of compunction.

"It did not help me to bear it. I have felt very lonely at times." Pauline spoke more to herself than to her companion, and there was a pathetic tone in her voice that was not lost upon Margaret.

"It was my fault, and I'm sorry for it," she said abruptly; "the others were led by me. Stay with me the rest of the night. I don't like being alone."

"Yes, dear, of course; I meant to stay unless you turned me out," Pauline replied, venturing for the first time upon an endearing epithet.

"But not out there?" Margaret added, lifting up the bedclothes as an invitation to Pauline to ensconce herself between them.

The two girls talked on far into the night, and when the bell rang Pauline was glad to see poor Margaret's weary eyes closed in sleep.

At an early hour the carriage that was to convey Margaret to the station arrived. She had requested that none of the girls or governesses might be there to see her depart, but that a message of farewell might instead be conveyed from her to them; so that Miss Walmer and Pauline alone were present.

Just as she was starting Pauline brought a flat

basket containing a simple white wreath. "May I send it?" she asked. Margaret did not reply, but looked down at the pure white blossoms, which seemed to tell their own tale of death and separation, and once more the rarely-seen tears flowed forth.

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET OFFENDS A FAITHFUL FRIEND.

WHEN Margaret alighted at East Mere Station, with the maid who had been sent to fetch her, the first figure her eyes fell upon was that of Lady Monteith. "I took upon myself to drive down to meet you," she said, approaching the girl briskly. "Your father, poor man, has plenty to think of, and can't be spared to look after his own affairs even now. There's Colonel Frampton must needs dislocate his arm and half kill himself, as he might expect if he will follow the hounds at his time of life, and of course your father must dance attendance on him. Well, well, we're all selfish."

Lady Monteith glanced at Margaret's face and dis-

cerned traces of tears. There was nothing she disliked so much as an outward display of grief. She did not know how to meet it, nor what consolation to offer.

So she talked somewhat freely, for her, about many trivial things. The effect upon Margaret was all that she desired. The girl was before long her usual self, bright, disdainful, and sarcastic, so that Lady Monteith began to suspect she had been mistaken in attributing the paleness of Margaret's cheeks and heaviness of her eyes to a night spent in tears.

"The children are over with me," she said, as they neared her father's house. "Will you join them, or would you like to go home first?"

"Home," Margaret replied, realising with a certain sense of bitterness how little feeling Lady Monteith gave her credit for.

"Well, cheer your father up," the old lady cried briskly. "He's inclined to give way a great deal too much. There are plenty of troubles worse than his, if he did but know it."

Margaret's heart swelled with indignation as she turned away from her friend, and she recalled the different way Pauline had offered her sympathy. Her intolerant spirit prevented her from seeing that Lady Monteith was intending to be kind.

So the girl went into the house she had left only three weeks before without a thought that evil could come to that happy, cheerful spot. How all was

"MARGARET ALIGHTED AT EAST MERE STATION" (p. 63.)

changed! The gloom and hush of a great sorrow lay on everything, and though the old cook came out to meet her with every tenderness and solicitude, Margaret felt that this was hardly to be called home, this household bereft of the guiding spirit that had made it so different from every other place.

It was not until the luncheon hour that Margaret met her father. The change that was everywhere seemed to have settled more heavily still upon him. He was aged and bent, and Margaret, casting a furtive glance at him, saw a face out of which all happiness seemed to have died.

What could she do for him, she wondered, remembering Pauline's words, all the sympathetic part of her nature roused by the sight of a sorrow she could only dimly comprehend. Certainly not much. He scarcely seemed aware of her presence. She could only place food upon his plate, which, however, he scarcely touched. Then when the silent meal was ended he rose from the table and went out. Presently the brougham passed the window, and Margaret saw her father's sad face turned towards that up stairs room as it carried him away.

Elizabeth the cook, an old servant, came running in, in great consternation. "Oh dear, Miss Margaret, I never thought you'd let him go alone. *She* mostly went with him after lunch. Why didn't you go with him?"

Margaret drew herself up haughtily. A reproof from Elizabeth seemed quite out of place.

"Papa did not ask me," she said coldly.

"It's not likely he would," continued Elizabeth; "but if you'd been ready and got in without a word, I think he'd have been pleased, and you might have talked to him, and cheered him up a bit. He really hadn't ought to go alone."

"I think you forget whom you are speaking to, Elizabeth," Margaret exclaimed, getting indignant.

"It's not likely," returned Elizabeth, good-humouredly. "I've lived in this house long enough to know every one of you as well as I know myself."

"But not long enough to be mistress of it," Margaret replied haughtily, suspecting Elizabeth of a desire to take undue advantage of her firm footing in the house.

"I never thought of such a thing," Elizabeth cried, hurt and offended; "I had that love for your dear mamma, that her wishes were like law to me. She trusted me, and so may you, Miss Margaret; I'd act the same by your papa and you all as if she was here. I gave her my solemn promise to be faithful, and it's what I mean to be."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," Margaret said somewhat grandly, and feeling a little annoyed rather than not that Elizabeth should feel this matter so keenly, a sort of infringement of her rights, as it seemed to her.

The tone and manner were not lost on Elizabeth, simple, tender-hearted countrywoman though she was.

Nothing but her love for the dead could have enabled her to bear it patiently, and retain her dutiful affection for one who had so wounded her.

For the most part, Margaret preserved a calm demeanour during these sad days. Only once did her strong self-control give way, and that was when the moment arrived that she must look for the very last time upon her mother's face. Then she broke into such

"GRACIE . . . DREW HIM TO A CHAIR."

a passion of sobbing and weeping that her father, who stood by, was obliged to hurry from the scene.

Faithful Elizabeth took upon herself to send over to Lady Monteith's for the children, as soon as her master

had departed on his sad errand. And so she contrived to have them all in the room to greet him when he returned, a bright young group, most of whom were quite unable to realise the loss they had sustained.

He would have sent them away; but Gracie, the baby, a merry little sprite of three, drew him to a chair, and jumped upon his knee, conscious of nothing but that she had been away from papa several days, and wanted her usual petting.

Then the others drew round him, more timidly, and the father would not send them away unnoticed, when there was no loving mother to run to with each childish disappointment, so he bore with them for a time, till Elizabeth, ever on the watch, came in to carry them off to their own domain, Margaret alone remaining with him.

She did not venture to speak, while he sat silent, his face turned away; but many a time she glanced towards the bent head, which had grown grey in the past few days, and all that was in her of gentleness and affection was roused by the sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING OF INTEREST.

NEARLY a week had passed away before Dr. Crawford spoke to Margaret on the subject that was uppermost in both minds. During this time Margaret had made up her mind that she would, if her father were willing, finally leave school and remain at home. It was her proper place, she told herself, not only that she might be helpful to her father—for in these days she was inclined to think a good deal about him — but also that she might see that no one crept unconsciously into her mother's place. In

other words, though she did not own it, perhaps was not at all aware of it, her natural jealousy was up in arms. She must be on the spot to see that no one attempted to assume a position of authority over her. In point of fact, after her mother she intended to be first, and so little can we judge our own motives when blinded by self-love, jealousy, or any other unworthy passion, that she was firmly convinced all the time she was thinking only of her father.

They were sitting alone in the dining-room one evening, when her father suddenly broke the silence which he had till now preserved on the subject of her mother's death.

"Your mother would have liked to see you, Margaret," he said abruptly. "She was anxious about you. She knew better than we did what was coming. I find she sat up and wrote something for you, believing she would not see you again. Value it, child; it hastened her death."

He handed Margaret a folded sheet of paper on which were traced a few lines, in broken, irregular characters.

"Papa," Margaret said, unwilling to lose an opportunity which so rarely occurred, for her father had scarcely spoken to her hitherto, "shall I stay at home with you?"

"Leave school?" he exclaimed absently. "For the present perhaps, but not permanently."

"Couldn't I have lessons at home, and so stay with you altogether?" Margaret asked eagerly.

"It might be done if you wish it," her father replied gratefully; "I dare say the children would be glad to have you. And—yes it might be as well. But your own education must not be sacrificed. I will ask Lady Monteith to see about masters, and you could study every day with Miss Strangeford."

This last proposition did not altogether please Margaret; but she said nothing, thinking it very possible that she might make such arrangements as she liked best without much opposition from her father, for he was a silent, studious man, very much engrossed in his profession, and always accustomed to leave all domestic details to those whom they concerned.

Margaret felt that it would be ungracious to urge any objections just now; but she was tolerably assured in her own mind that she should not willingly place herself under the control of the little ones' young daily governess, or put herself on a footing with her young brothers and sisters, by joining in their lesson hour. Teddy, her next brother, who had begun to attend East Mere College, was nearly four years younger than herself, and the eldest of Miss Strangeford's pupils only just nine. To join this infant class did not at all fall in with Margaret's notions of her own importance and abilities.

"So far as that goes," she said to herself when she was thinking the matter over, "why couldn't I leave

off English? I was more advanced than any one else at Miss Walmer's, and I don't see what more I need, except history, which I like, and could go on reading by myself."

Not until she was alone in her own room did Margaret venture to read the paper her father had given to her. It was with a certain amount of awe that she touched the paper and looked upon the lines written by the dead. Her hand trembled and her eyes grew dim. It was some minutes before she could decipher the words, which she read over until they were indelibly fixed upon her memory. They were these:—

"DEAREST CHILD,—I feel that we shall not meet again in this world. I have been thinking and praying much for you in these last few hours. You have been my chief anxiety, because I see, dear Margaret, much that may make you grow up a very unhappy woman; I would have you conquer your enemies, and be beloved and happy. God alone can help you, my child [here the writing began to grow straggling and illegible]. Never forget that you have an enemy who will ruin your whole life, unless you overcome—your—most—bitter enemy, dear—child——"

The last few words were far apart and difficult to decipher. It was evident that the dying mother's strength had failed, and a splutter of ink across the sheet seemed to show that the pen had fallen from her fingers.

But that last unfinished sentence took fast hold of Margaret's mind. Its very incompleteness lent it a fascination that the rest of the letter did not possess,

touching memorial though it was of a mother's love and anxiety for her first-born.

Although Margaret, as we have seen, prided herself upon her great honesty of character, she was singularly blind to the motives which prompted much of her conduct, and, indeed, less ready to perceive her own defects than most people. In this instance she pondered over her mother's words, recurring to certain sentences and entirely ignoring others, in a way that was not likely to lead her to obtain from them their true meaning. She rightly guessed that her mother intended to say much more, though her imagination supplied a termination that was very far from the right one.

"Who could be the enemy mamma wanted to warn me of," she pondered, feeling herself raised to the pinnacle of a heroine. "Is there some one who has a secret influence over my future? A bitter enemy who would try to rob me of everything, and ruin my life?" she pondered, seizing, with a certain sense of importance that was rather pleasant than not, on the idea that she was connected with some mystery. "What would poor mamma have said if she could have finished her letter? or did she really know what she was writing?" she said to herself, again and again. But the more she looked at the written words, the more sure she felt that her mother's mind had been very clear about what she wished to say. Only at the last were the sentences confused, not by the mind of the writer, but through the inability to write; and Margaret believed that the

word "your" was the beginning of a new sentence which should have ended with the name of the enemy of whom she was to beware. Alas, that the writer's strength had failed just then, leaving the child she had sought to warn in endless doubt, and robbing the caution of its chief value. The more she pondered over the matter, the more serious it seemed to her. Was there a great deal more hidden behind those few unfinished sentences, something that had made her father the taciturn, silent man he had always been? What was the mystery, or who could give her the clue?

"I shall have to look on every one with suspicion," she said to herself, "until I find out who this enemy is." And then her mind went roving among all her acquaintances, but without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, or indeed any conclusion at all; and she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

MARGARET ASSUMES A NEW POSITION.

AFTER a few weeks, the bereaved household fell once more into some sort of routine. Miss Strangeford resumed the morning lessons with the younger children, Dr. Crawford returned to the old arrangements, seeing such poor patients as sought his advice in his surgery immediately after an early breakfast, walking during the remainder of the morning, and driving in the afternoon. There was little change observable in his manner, except that he had grown more silent even than was usual with him; but those who knew him best read the extent of his grief in the aged appearance that had suddenly come over him. Perhaps for Margaret, who saw him daily, this was not

so noticeable as for others, though she had been struck when she first came home.

The wildness of her own grief had abated, and was also greatly absorbed by many new and unexpected interests, and judging others by herself, as young people are so prone, she began to think that her father had succeeded in forgetting his trouble, through the interest he took in his profession.

And now Margaret began to look round and to see that things were not as she would have them. Elizabeth had so far been invested with powers which Margaret considered quite beyond her province. It was she who each day arranged the various meals, ordering what was required, and setting the bills before the doctor in methodical fashion, each Saturday morning, according to the custom which had long prevailed under the rule of the late mistress. Undoubtedly she was worthy of the utmost confidence, and Dr. Crawford as undoubtedly relied upon her. But Margaret never viewed that Saturday morning event without a sensation that she was being defrauded of a right; and at length this feeling grew so strong that she was determined that she would make a grand effort to take the undue authority out of Elizabeth's hands, and transfer it to her own.

It was one morning after the irritating duty had been duly performed by Elizabeth that she arrived at this conclusion. There was nothing therefore to be done at present in the matter. Her father had gone

out, and Elizabeth was safely intrusted with the sums of money required for the various bills.

"But I can begin to show Elizabeth that she is the servant and not the mistress here," she said to herself with great decision, and drawing herself up to her full height, which for a girl of barely fifteen, was somewhat imposing, she having already attained the average height of her sex, she marched with stately step into the kitchen, where Elizabeth, whose inspection of bills and tradesmen's books generally drove her a little behind, was bustling about, disposing of the breakfast things, giving orders, running every minute to answer the bell, always very refractory on Saturday morning, thinking about her cooking and arrangements for Sunday, and indeed, as she herself described it, with twenty things on her hands at once.

She had, moreover, as was her custom, just turned out her larder with a view to clearing up all odds and ends, so that she might begin fair with the new week, and with a conscientious regard to economy was considering how most profitably to use up the ends of two joints, some cold college pudding, and one or two other things which remained on her hands.

"Do you always have such a litter about?" Margaret asked, glancing at the crowd of cups and saucers and plates on one table, some dishes from the larder on another, a pan containing some slices of stale bread, and the remnants of a leg of mutton on the dresser.

"Dear me, no!" replied Elizabeth good-humouredly,

not suspecting that Margaret meant any reproof. "Saturday morning's a nohow sort of morning, you know, Miss Margaret. There's so much to be thought of. Now, you see," she continued, with a kindly idea of initiating Margaret into some of the mysteries of housekeeping, "we must clear up all odds and ends, and the difficulty is to make enough of them, without having to run on to another dish which would leave something more to be cleared up, most likely. I've just turned all out, and you see there's a good bit of that mutton from yesterday, and some beef from the day before. Well, you see, we want a pretty good deal of meat for the dining-room and the nursery and the kitchen, especially with such a hearty fellow as Jacob to think of. Now shall I tell you what I am going to do with these things?"

"You may do so if you like," Margaret replied grandly.

Elizabeth may have felt a little surprised at the coldness of Margaret's voice; but every one in the house knew that she gave herself airs which were always spoken of as "Miss Margaret's way." So without appearing to notice it she continued—

"Well, I'm going first to cut some slices off this beef for us in the kitchen, the rest I shall cut off the bones, and mince, sending it to table curried as your papa likes it, with some mashed potatoes and a dish of cauliflowers. There will be a nice little dish of fish first; and this college pudding I shall serve up hot, in a

way that you won't know it. The mutton I shall make into some rissoles with these pieces of bread for the nursery. And I shall make a milk pudding, such as your papa likes the children to have. A little cheese custard for your papa will finish it off nicely. I'm glad to think he's given up the late dinner, for it was but a lonesome sort of meal for him. It's not much he takes, and of course we must try to tempt him, as well as use up our odds and ends."

"Papa likes joints better than those wretched minces," Margaret replied coolly. "We'll have a joint of some sort, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth looked up, doubting her ears.

"That would leave my larder as bad as ever," she said, still good-humouredly.

"Never mind about the larder, Elizabeth. Papa is of more consequence than your larder, I suppose. He does not like made-up dishes like those, and he shan't have them," Margaret returned, in her most determined manner.

"Has he complained?" Elizabeth asked, doubtfully, wavering between her respect and allegiance to the family and a suspicion that Miss Margaret was endeavouring to assume an authority over her unbecoming from so young a girl to a trusted servant of ten years' standing. "If the master has any objection, why then, of course, we must get something else for him; but it was your mamma's way. She would never allow a bit of anything to be wasted. It was she

taught me how to turn everything to the best advantage, and my best wishes are to follow out everything she told me, as if she was here to give me her orders now," Elizabeth continued, with a slight tremor in her voice.

But Margaret thought she could well understand Elizabeth's allusion. It was only a weapon artfully used to gain her own way, which Margaret was quite determined she should not have. Margaret professed to admire candour above all things, and Elizabeth's weak artifice—as she deemed it—instead of softening her, filled her with something like contempt.

"Papa never objects to anything," Margaret replied, "but that is no reason why he should be given things he doesn't care about."

"The butcher has been," Elizabeth urged as a conclusive argument.

"Then Jacob or Mary will have to go to him," Margaret returned authoritatively. "No, stop, Hart's is nearer. Send Jacob for a fowl. That'll do very much better."

"Will you give him the order, then, miss?" Elizabeth said, with a little asperity, and turning round abruptly to her work, not a little disconcerted at Margaret's interference.

"Certainly I will," Margaret replied, haughtily; send him to me."

Elizabeth went off on her errand with what Margaret chose to call "a flounce." "I shall teach her to keep

all that to herself," Margaret thought; "she thinks she is mistress here; but she will soon find that she is not."

Jacob came in blowing and puffing from the midst of his grooming. "You are to go down to Hart's and fetch a fowl," Margaret exclaimed as he entered.

"I be right in the thick of my work, ma'am," old Jacob replied, looking from one to the other uncomprehendingly.

Margaret's temper began to rise. "Then you can leave it," she said sharply.

"No, ma'am, I can't," the old man replied, with a good-humoured twinkle in his eye. "Them poor beasts out there can't be left in the middle o' their toilet hoperations." And with never a word of apology Jacob turned round and took himself off.

Margaret was a little bit taken aback, but she suppressed her anger as well as she was able. Jacob was valued by her father, and she hardly dared to risk an open breach, so she made the best of the matter by sending Mary instead.

When the servants sat down to their own dinner Margaret's behaviour was freely discussed. Jacob began—"Our young lady seems to be giving herself airs," he remarked meditatively.

"She's got a mighty ordering way with her," chimed in Mary, the housemaid. "I don't half like it. She speaks to you as if you was the dirt under her feet. She's been up stairs interfering with me the

whole morning. I think she's a mind to turn the whole house topsy-turvy, and find fault with everything. A bit of a child like that, indeed!"

"She's very anxious to see after the master," replied Elizabeth, who was always disinclined to speak against "the family," "and I am glad to think it, poor gentleman, though Miss Margaret seems to mistrust me."

"Look after the master!" echoed Mary, laughing satirically. "There's some one Miss Margaret thinks about long before her papa, and that's herself."

Old Jacob, who copied his master in being a man of few words, only remarked, "There's a bit of the tyrant in our young lady."

In the meantime, Margaret ate her roast fowl with a certain amount of satisfaction, not unmingled, however, with annoyance. She could plainly see that it would be no easy matter to make the servants pay her the deference that she considered due to her. Had she forgotten that only four or five weeks previously she had passionately protested that she could never attempt to fill her mother's place? Yet already her whole mind was bent on doing so, not apparently in the desire to render real service to those around her, but for the sake of asserting the independence that was so dear to her self-willed nature; yet no doubt she really believed that she was endeavouring to benefit her father. Whether she really did so or not we shall learn farther on.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

MARGARET'S sudden interference in household matters on that Saturday morning was only the beginning of hostilities. From that day she went into the kitchen every morning, and gave her orders with all the authority of a woman. And she soon found an opportunity of bringing her father round to her plans.

"I think, papa," she said one morning, with all proper diffidence, "I could very well see to those accounts which Elizabeth spends so much time over. I am quick at arithmetic."

"Ah, yes; no doubt it does waste much of Elizabeth's time," Dr. Crawford replied. "I never thought

of that. She's a very good woman. It would be well for you to help her in any way you can."

"Yes," Margaret replied eagerly, "and I could do that so easily. I have been helping her in the housekeeping a bit lately," she continued.

Margaret was too much bent on her own ends to notice the spasm of pain that crossed her father's face at this illusion to the forlorn state of the household.

"Well, you shall show me what sort of an arithmetician you are," he said, with a smile. "Go and get the tradesmen's books from Elizabeth, and show me how quickly and well you can place before me a brief statement of the week's bills."

Margaret obeyed with alacrity. In a very few minutes the statement was ready, and found by her father to be entirely correct.

"That will do," he said. "Now I will show you how to enter all these accounts properly, and in future you shall have the keeping of them."

Margaret was delighted, and paid great heed to her father's instructions. In this mood she was a most apt and agreeable pupil.

And now she considered that she was invested with full authority by her father himself, and was not slow to act upon the advantage she had gained. She took the foot of the table at dinner, and poured out the coffee and tea in the morning and the evening. The later meal, whether dinner or tea, had been one at which Dr. Crawford and his wife were always alone

"IN A VERY FEW MINUTES THE STATEMENT WAS READY" (p. 86).

unless guests were present, and any close observer might easily have detected that it was on these occasions, when the strain of the day's occupation was relaxed, that the sense of his bereavement came back most vividly to him. Margaret remarked that her father was more than usually silent at such times, sitting with his arm-chair turned away from the table; and rather at a loss to know what to do, thought she would try whether the presence of the elder children would cheer him. But her expedient ended unfortunately, for one of the little girls demanded a second piece of tea-cake, which Margaret said was very naughty, and refused it somewhat sharply; whereupon little Edith declared that her mamma always let her have two pieces of cake when she came down stairs to tea. Dr. Crawford got up and abruptly quitted the room, and in future, when tea-time arrived, he retired to the library, and requested some to be brought to him there.

Margaret was not a little discomfited at this occurrence. She gave poor bewildered Edith a good scolding, and told her never to say such a thing again, and in order to distract her father's thoughts—for she did not at all wish to go on having her tea alone—she removed a portrait of her mother which hung in the dining-room to her own bed-room. But her father missed it the first moment he entered the room, and somewhat sternly told her to put it back; nor did he any more appear at the tea-table.

At the end of six months Margaret had contrived to gain for herself a position in which she really did exactly as she pleased. Elizabeth had, of course, relinquished the household accounts, and this was but the first step towards taking into her own hands the control of all household arrangements. Dr. Crawford, who became more self-absorbed than ever, seemed not to notice any of these things, not even remarking that the demands on his pocket were gradually but continually increasing. Margaret, indeed, knew nothing whatever about domestic management, which was not to be expected of her, at so young an age; but she acted as if she were perfectly acquainted with the whole thing, and would not suffer Elizabeth to give her any advice. The consequence was that, in spite of the cook's conscientious care, there was a certain amount of extravagance creeping into the house.

On one occasion, when the gardener had sent in a large basket of strawberries for preserving (the last gathering) Margaret had arranged in her mind that Elizabeth should have a special baking of bread and cakes. She was most wofully offended at the suggestion that the baking should be left until the next day, and looked upon it as an attempt to set her at defiance. The gardener had no business to gather the fruit without asking about it, she declared, and although Elizabeth explained that it generally had to be gathered all in a hurry, just when it seemed to be getting too ripe, or it threatened for rain, Margaret would not see

it; so the bread was baked and the fruit was spoiled.

Elizabeth was very indignant, and was greatly tempted to go to her master; but she was loth to trouble him with complaints, which she felt sure would greatly distress him, so she bore Margaret's caprices with as much patience as she could, consoling herself with the reflection that she'd grow out of it in time.

But every one in the house was not as patient as Elizabeth. The other servants rebelled continually, and occasionally flatly refused to obey her.

The master who had been engaged by Lady Monteith to carry on Margaret's education complained that he never had a more troublesome pupil. The fact of the matter was that Margaret's mind was too much occupied by other matters for her to interest herself in study, and when Herr Engel politely declined to teach her any longer, she cleverly contrived to get her father to leave the matter in abeyance for the time being.

In the meanwhile a small rebellion was brewing in the house. The time arrived when Margaret suddenly discovered that she wanted all sorts of new garments, and about the same time the nurse requested her to ask Dr. Crawford about some new frocks and jackets for her little charges. Her father gave her ten pounds, and told her to obtain Lady Monteith's advice about spending it.

This, however, Margaret resolved not to do. She

was perfectly sure she could choose a dress for herself without any one's assistance. So she sallied forth on a shopping expedition with much elation, chose the materials for one or two dresses, bought some boots, gloves, laces, ribbons, ties, and a heap of other trifling things which took her fancy, and seemed cheap enough. When the bill was put into her hands she found, to her surprise, she had spent nearly all the money, and left out the most necessary things, the children's jackets.

Her pride would not allow her to return the unnecessary articles, so there was nothing for it but to make the children go on wearing their old ones. But their nurse declared that was quite impossible. They had already been mended until they were not fit to be seen, because she had not liked to speak before. Margaret grew haughty, and told her that it was not her place to say what the children should wear, to which Morris replied that they had never worn anything so shabby in their mother's lifetime, and she was quite sure the Doctor wouldn't like it if he knew. It ended in Morris saying she must speak to Dr. Crawford herself, which Margaret very promptly forbade her to do, whereupon Morris lost her temper and declared she would not stay in the house to be ordered about by a mere child another day. Margaret, who was secretly very much afraid of her exploit reaching her father's ears, was glad to take Morris at her word and let her go immediately.

But she had very little idea what a train of difficulties she was laying for herself, nor how her haughty and selfish behaviour was gradually, but surely, drawing her into the danger of which she had been warned by her mother's dying message.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNFORTUNATE VISIT.

WHEN Morris had packed up her traps and taken herself off, Margaret did not feel so elated as she certainly had been at first. The nursery left without any mistress was not an altogether pleasant fact to contemplate, especially as Margaret had no idea of endeavouring to fill the post herself.

Mary, when applied to, declared that she was most particularly busy this week, and that if she looked after the children her own work must go undone. To this Margaret agreed, little anticipating the consequences.

The first disagreeable result was when she went into her bedroom about one o'clock, and found it still untidied. A look round assured her that the others were the same. That must be altered, at any rate, so she went after Mary to scold her for having taken a mean advantage of the agreement. Mary, who certainly possessed something of a temper, had purposely neglected everything in order to avenge her fellow-servant Morris, who was her great friend, and who, she considered, had been shamefully treated.

When Margaret entered the nursery she found that Mary and the children were out, and she perceived that unless she ran the risk of exposing to her father the whole state of affairs she must set to work herself.

This she did in no very amiable mood; but the task of bringing into order the almost chaotic confusion of her own room was by no means a light one, even for an experienced hand. Margaret tossed about the bedclothes, covering her black dress with flue, and finding she could not get them straight, flew into a passion at the trick which she felt she had been served by the servant.

She was stamping about, with a very red face and flashing eyes, when the door-bell rang.

"It can't be a visitor," Margaret thought. "Some one has come to the front door by mistake, instead of going to the surgery."

But Elizabeth came in presently to say Lady Monteith wanted to see Margaret for a few minutes.

"And did you go to the door like that?" Margaret

asked, eyeing Elizabeth's not too clean cotton gown, large apron, and warm-looking face.

"I was obliged to," Elizabeth returned. "A cook's place is in the kitchen, you know, Miss Margaret, and she can't keep herself like a housemaid."

"You know how to make excuses, Elizabeth," Margaret returned crossly, as she went down to see her visitor.

But, to her annoyance, there was someone else with Lady Monteith, a much younger lady, tall and dignified, whose eyes opened inquiringly, as they fell upon Margaret's flushed face, rumpled hair, and fluey gown.

"Elizabeth never told me you had any one with you," Margaret said in a mortified tone, as Lady Monteith said, "My niece has come to make your acquaintance."

"That is not a very polite way of receiving a stranger," Lady Monteith remarked unsparingly. "And pray, child, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh! all sorts of things: turning out my wardrobe and romping with the children," Margaret replied evasively.

Miss Drummond, Lady Monteith's niece, smiled. "You do not look very old yourself," she said in a slightly amused voice, which Margaret very much resented.

"The annual flower-show is to-morrow, and I came over hoping to find your father in," Lady Monteith

"THERE WAS SOME ONE ELSE WITH LADY MONTEITH" (p. 96).

presently remarked, "for I want him to come. You don't take enough care of your father, Margaret. He looks sadly altered."

"I take all the care of him I can," Margaret replied coldly. "I attend to the housekeeping."

"Ah!" the old lady returned sharply. "Very engrossing work that. No doubt you gave up Herr Engel in order to attend to it better."

"I couldn't very well see to both," Margaret replied, falling in with the idea as a good way of avoiding a difficulty and excusing herself.

"Well," the old lady exclaimed, fixing her penetrating eyes on Margaret's face, "it is a good thing to do even one thing thoroughly; and no doubt, having studied this matter so deeply, you have become quite an adept. Many persons prefer such accomplishments to any others."

"I think Margaret is very good to give up her studies for her father's sake," Miss Drummond said kindly, thinking her aunt was rather hard.

Margaret began to feel that she had been very self-denying, so easily may one be self-deceived.

"Very good," Lady Monteith assented dryly. "By the way, Margaret, does your father often go out without his breakfast?"

"Without his breakfast?" echoed Margaret in surprise.

"Yes. I found out, when I questioned him closely the other day, that he had come out without taking

anything. No wonder he looks ill. When I remarked that I wondered you let him neglect himself like that, he told me that you had not been down to breakfast for the last month."

Margaret coloured, for this was indeed but a mild statement of the case. For some time past Margaret had indulged herself in the habit of coming down so late that her father, who scarcely ate anything unless it were placed before him, was kept waiting until he had lost what little relish he already had. Several times he expostulated, and for a morning or two Margaret did better; but her long-cherished habit of pleasing herself first was too powerful now that there was no one to hold it in check, and gradually it became her habit to come down nearly an hour after the early breakfast hour which was the rule of Dr. Crawford's house. She had never thought how this might affect her father, nor inquired about his meal, taking it for granted that he had eaten it alone.

"Bessie is very curious to see your wandering, old-fashioned house," Lady Monteith said, abruptly changing the subject. "Will you let her examine the carved mantel in the dining-room?"

"Certainly," Margaret replied, leading the way.

While Miss Drummond was stooping over the quaint carving, Lady Monteith was critically eyeing the room and taking notes of it, and being as particular a lady as well could be, what she saw did not altogether please her.

"This is a beautiful piece of workmanship," Miss Drummond exclaimed. "Are there any more carvings like this about the house?"

"I remember one in a bedroom," Lady Monteith said, turning to Margaret. "It was a spare room, I think."

"It is my room now," Margaret replied.

"Are you curious to see it, Bessie?" Lady Monteith asked. "Margaret will take you, I am sure."

"I would rather not," Margaret exclaimed shortly; but Lady Monteith, who was as energetic in action as in speech, had already led the way through the hall to the staircase.

"This is the way," she exclaimed, nimbly mounting the stairs, followed by her niece and Margaret, who was meditating how she could prevent the ladies from entering her room.

While she was thinking about it, Lady Monteith had found her way in, and was standing taking a leisurely inspection of everything.

"You had better not come in, Bessie," she said, holding her hand.

"That is just what I told you, Lady Monteith," Margaret exclaimed, scarcely abashed.

The old lady soon trotted downstairs again.

"Margaret," she said, as they stood in the hall, "your father's foolish if he doesn't marry again."

"What!" gasped Margaret, scarcely believing her

ears. "How dare you say such a thing, Lady Monteith? No one shall ever come here in mamma's place."

"My dear," Lady Monteith replied, with an aggravating smile, "if your father chose to do it, you may depend you wouldn't be consulted."

"Papa wouldn't," Margaret cried indignantly. "You don't know how fond he was of mamma."

"The very reason why he should," Lady Monteith returned. "The more he misses her the more he requires some one to fill her place."

Margaret was about to reply, when her tongue was stayed by her father's appearance among them.

"We want you to take us to the flower-show tomorrow," Lady Monteith began. "My niece is anxious to go, and you really are expected to be present. The cottagers would never be satisfied unless you had something to do with the awards."

"If you could find any one else," Dr. Crawford began; but Lady Monteith interrupted him impatiently. "There's no one else I would ask. You know my opinion of my neighbours. If you don't choose to take us, we will stay at home."

"These scenes are not much to my taste," the doctor remarked, with something like a sigh. "I am happiest when at my work; but, of course, if you wish to go——"

"You are working yourself to death," Lady Mon-

teith exclaimed petulantly. "An afternoon's leisure will refresh you. Come, and bring Margaret with you. I will call at three o'clock;" and without waiting for any further debate, Lady Monteith took herself off with her niece.

"You were very unkind to that poor child, aunt," Miss Drummond began when they were outside.

"The house is going to rack and ruin," Lady Monteith replied sharply. "I never liked the doctor's wife much—she was one of the amiable, fascinating women whom every one adores, and for that very reason I did not care for her—but I will say she was an excellent wife, and managed her house admirably. How Dr. Crawford can let that child go on as she is doing I cannot think."

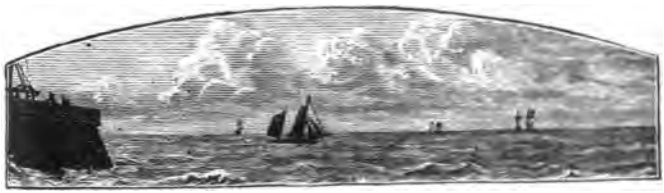
"And I suppose you said what you did to rouse her jealousy and make her more careful."

"Yes, if you like to put it in that way," Lady Monteith replied. "I certainly tried to open her eyes. She is a very clever girl, and might do wonders if she were not so selfish and self-willed. However, if she doesn't improve I must put some one over that household."

Miss Drummond laughed. "Do you suppose you have so much influence over Dr. Crawford as that?" she asked.

"I have sufficient force of character to carry out what I undertake, and to bend weak wills to mine,"

Lady Monteith answered shortly. So she thought, although she had already experienced something of people whose wills she thought weak choosing for themselves. In this case, also, she was reckoning without her host



CHAPTER XII.

A GLIMPSE OF PAULINE.

THE six months that had passed since Margaret's departure had brought little or no further change to Miss Walmer's establishment. Pauline's life had certainly been happier, and the task of winning her way with the girls far less difficult.

Indeed, she had become so much of a favourite that she would have had little left to desire, had not her own health become a source of grave anxiety. Her earnest endeavours to make the best use of every opportunity to advance her education were continually thwarted by small attacks of illness, which rendered her so listless that study was very nearly, and sometimes quite, an impossibility.

Patient and enduring as she was, there were times when she was compelled to give way, and reluctantly resign herself to the rest and nursing which Miss Walmer saw she required.

"My dear," said Miss Walmer, coming one evening, and seating herself by Pauline's bedside, "I want to have a little serious talk with you."

Pauline's heart beat fast with anticipation. She had long feared that Miss Walmer must find her an unprofitable bargain.

"I was speaking to the doctor about you to-day," Miss Walmer continued, "and he tells me that the cause of your ill-health is solely the change from an outdoor life to the close confinement of a schoolroom, together with the strain of incessant mental work, to which you have been less accustomed than most girls; and he also thinks that living in London is bad for you. If you could have a complete change to the country for a few months it might set you up and enable you to go on, but"—and here Miss Walmer's voice grew ominous—"he thinks that if you stay here you will grow worse rather than better; and therefore I want you to tell me, Pauline, whether you have not any friends in England to whom I could write on your behalf."

"There is no one," Pauline answered quickly.

"Well, you see, dear," Miss Walmer went on, "it would not be right of me to keep you here, knowing that your health is being gradually ruined, to say

nothing of the business aspect of the arrangement. I am giving you every advantage in the way of masters, as if you were one of my best pupils; and I will not deny that your progress has been a credit to us, and has pleased every one who has taught you. But you know, Pauline, as a matter of business I look for an adequate return. When first you came you were of little use in the way of teaching. And all that time was so much loss to me; but I looked forward hopefully. Since Margaret Crawford left I am bound to say you have been able to control the girls and keep them to their work even better than Mademoiselle. But, unfortunately, you are never well, and every few weeks you are quite unable to perform your duties. Is it not so?

Pauline was obliged sadly to admit that this was no unfair statement, and Miss Walmer continued—

"Now, if you could only go somewhere for the holidays it would be better both for you and me. But I have been seriously thinking that unless something of the kind can be done I shall be obliged to consult with your parents about the advisability of your return to them."

"Oh! please don't do that!" Pauline exclaimed quickly. "They do not even know about my health It would have distressed them so that I never told them; and indeed I cannot go back yet."

It would seem a pity to return without finishing

your education," Miss Walmer said thoughtfully; "but I should say there are plenty of schools in Melbourne, for instance, where you might be received on the same terms as you are here, and where probably your health would be better."

"I cannot leave England," Pauline replied, with something like obstinacy.

"Well, my dear," Miss Walmer returned, a little impatiently, "you must consider, then, what you can do, and let me know. I do not wish to seem unkind, but I could not maintain my school if I were to take pupils who cost me a great deal and paid me nothing."

Pauline quite saw that, and she only wondered that Miss Walmer had not spoken to her about it before. All she had said was quite fair and just, yet to Pauline it seemed very hard.

To Miss Walmer too it seemed a hard case. She had thought about it a very great deal before she had spoken. "If there were the least chance of her getting strong I would put up with the present inconvenience," she said to herself; "but I am paying expensive masters for her, boarding the girl all the year round, positively losing over the affair, and doing the girl an injury, so that for her sake as well as mine something must be done;" and Miss Walmer, who was really a kind-hearted woman, sighed at the task before her.

For Pauline the blow, though not unexpected, was

none the less heavy. To go back to her parents with nothing accomplished was not to be thought of. She knew too well what that would mean—the sacrifice of her brothers and sisters to a life for which they were not fitted, and the continuation, on her mother's part, of a drudging, narrow existence, which was such a painful contrast to the home and surroundings of her early youth. Could she give up the grand projects that had so long filled her mind, over which she had spent years of careful deliberation, till it had become a thread woven inseparably into the web of her life? Such hopeless defeat was out of the question. Something must be done.

But what? For a while she almost felt inclined to tell her circumstances to Janie, who, she felt sure, would get her an invitation for the holidays from her parents. But she soon rejected this idea. A very strong feeling within her prevented her from seeking a favour she could never repay. Indeed, the notions of independence which had been instilled into her mind from her babyhood rendered it impossible, for she knew that her father would most keenly resent what he would consider such a humiliating position for his daughter, and she was not sure that it might not injure the cause she had at heart.

There was but one course open to her, and this was to write to the only person in England who could do anything for her. Whether Lady Monteith would befriend her was a matter of grave doubt. From the

little she had heard of her, Pauline did not entertain much hope. However, it must be tried as a last resource, and Pauline, having arrived at this decision, began to concoct in her mind the letter which was to decide her fate.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARGARET'S FIRST VISIT TO A FLOWER-SHOW.

MARGARET was delighted at the idea of going to the flower-show, not so much for any interest she took in the display of rare blooms and fruits, but because she knew it to be an occasion which all the high and wealthy people for many miles round graced with their presence, an unequalled opportunity of seeing and being seen. Margaret, who we know had a considerable share of vanity was not averse to either.

But a difficulty soon arose in her mind, so great a one that it seemed likely to throw over her prospect of going altogether. What could she wear?

She ran upstairs as soon as she could get away to her

untidy bedroom, and began overhauling her wardrobe. First her dresses were pulled down from their pegs and hastily inspected. A black merino, heavily trimmed with crape—crape very dusty, a few buttons off the front, a flounce, originally made in some elaborate fashion by the dressmaker, torn off and cobbled up in most inelegant style; that, for certain, would not do. Then there came a silk, also trimmed with crape; this was no better, the crape being spoilt with dust, and moreover, a large rent was across the skirt, which had been carelessly run up. Both dresses were ornamented in the front with various stains and grease-spots. Then there was a grenadine; but unfortunately it had fallen down, and had been lying in the bottom of the cupboard for some time, with several pairs of old boots and a heavy basket on the top of it, so that it only looked a crushed and dusty mass. Then she went to her drawers, and began turning over their multifarious contents—laces, ties, ribbons, gloves, artificial flowers, all thrown together in bewildering confusion. As Margaret sorted them out and perceived how crushed and spoilt they all were, she remembered with a keen pang of regret how much money she had thrown away in these costly trifles only a day or two before. From the confusion she selected a handsome white necktie, a pair of decent gloves, some real lace frills, and some flowers, which she had bought some days before, simply because they looked so real. These she fastened into her hat in place of a black feather, which she had worn in the rain till no vestige

of curl was left in it. But there still remained the difficulty about the dress, which, with all her ingenuity Margaret could not solve, for the material she had bought could not possibly be made up in time. Yet she was fully resolved not to give up the idea of going, if she could in any way manage it. Only one way occurred to her, and that was to go to the one draper in the village and select the best of the ready-made dresses he had on hand. Under any other circumstances she would have thought it quite beneath her dignity to wear such a "made-up thing," as she had often called such garments, but necessity had altered the case.

Her father had gone out, and was not likely to return until tea-time. It would be too late then to pay a visit to the shop. After some deliberation, Margaret decided to go and order the dress, feeling quite sure that she would be able to get her father to give her the money.

So she started off, but when she came to inspect the stock she was disappointed to find that all the dresses were made for people much older than herself. However, after considerable debate the shopwoman suggested that she should alter one of these to suit Margaret's requirements. "She would set several of her young people to work," she promised, and would let Miss Crawford have the dress without fail early on the next morning.

Margaret went home tolerably pleased with her exploit, which she considered displayed great tact and

skill. Her father did not come in to tea, so Margaret saw nothing of him till late in the evening, when he entered the dining-room looking very tired and worn.

It was not a very nice time to begin talking to him about her wants; but it must be done. "I shall have to get a new dress for the flower-show to-morrow," she began, when he was seated.

"New dress, child!" her father said in surprise. "Why, you had three or four made a few months ago, I should think, by the bill Robinson sent in."

"That's nearly six months ago," said Margaret.

"Well, well," said her father a little impatiently, "they should last you longer than this. Besides, you know, I gave you ten pounds the other day."

"That was for the children," Margaret replied; hastily adding, "one must be nicely dressed for a flower-show."

"An ordinary best gown will answer every purpose," said her father. "You are only a child, and in deep mourning besides."

"But, papa, you know how the people always dress," urged Margaret persistently.

"A great deal too much," her father replied. "Nothing would grieve me more than to see you decked out in such fashion. And more, you couldn't get a new dress by to-morrow."

"Oh, yes," cried Margaret eagerly. "Robinson always keeps some ready-made."

"Yes, and puts them in the window. You couldn't wear one of those, child. Every one in the place would know your gown, what it cost, and the whole history of it. A woman should never let her dress make her remarkable." And having said so much, Dr. Crawford relapsed into silence.

Now what was to be done? Margaret felt that she was in a fix; but still, she was pretty sure she should manage to get out of it somehow, and would not worry herself.

She went the next morning into the kitchen to give Elizabeth her orders for the day, but Elizabeth was nowhere about, and Margaret stood waiting impatiently for her to appear. While she waited someone banged against the outer door.

Margaret at length opened it, prepared to give the importunate person a sharp rebuke. There stood an old woman before her with a large pedlar's basket.

"What do you want?" she asked abruptly.

"I've just called to see whether you'd like to buy anything," the woman replied. "I've got some pretty odds and ends, and I'll take any cast-off thing in exchange. They deal with me at all the great houses round about." As she spoke she opened her basket and displayed before Margaret's eyes a profusion of rings, brooches, earrings, several tiny silver watches, and all sorts of trinkets.

"I don't want anything of that kind," Margaret replied, peering at the articles with some curiosity.

"Haven't you got anything to sell, my dear?" the old woman persisted; "I'll give you a good price. Any old dresses, boots, shoes, gentlemen's things, broken bits of jewellery—anything you like to mention."

Suddenly it flashed into Margaret's mind that here was a way of paying for her dress. "I can't get you anything now," she returned, "but I should like to sell you some old things when I have looked them up. Come round another day. Don't bring your basket with you, but ask for Miss Margaret, and say you've come on business;" and Margaret, hearing footsteps, began to close the door hastily.

"Very well, my dear," cried the old woman, as she shouldered her basket and began to trudge off; "I'll be sure to come."

The dress duly arrived, and Margaret fitted it on. It was not very nice: even her own taste told her that. The material was poor, the trimming excessive, and the style quite beyond her years, especially the bodice, which even now did not fit at all well.

"But it must do," Margaret thought, as she eyed herself in the glass, and endeavoured to arrange a costly lace scarf, which had been her mother's, over her shoulders.

"I wish you wouldn't leave your room in such a litter, Miss Margaret," exclaimed Mary, who at that moment entered the room, and cast a critical and half-amused glance at Margaret's elaborate "get-up." "I

had such work to tidy it yesterday after you'd been pulling your things about. The whole place was littered up."

"You are very rude," said Margaret, sharply. "It is no matter of yours how I leave my room."

"THERE STOOD AN OLD WOMAN BEFORE HER" (p. 115).

"Isn't it, though?" muttered Mary as she walked away.

Margaret presently descended to the drawing-room in no amiable mood to await the arrival of Lady Monteith and Miss Drummond. Dr. Crawford entered in a few minutes.

"What, Margaret!" he said, glancing at her in

surprise, "white flowers in your bonnet! There was no need of that."

"It was the only thing I had, papa," she replied, "and my hat was shabby."

"Put a cloak round you; it's chilly driving to-day," he said, without any further allusion to his daughter's attire.

Margaret wrapped a black shawl round her as Lady Monteith's carriage drew up outside.

"That's right; I dislike waiting," Lady Monteith exclaimed, as Margaret and her father appeared at the door. She looked in some surprise at the flowers in Margaret's hat, but made no remark, and the three elder persons began at once to talk about the show.

When they arrived at the grounds, Dr. Crawford and Lady Monteith were immediately seized upon by a number of interested individuals, so that Miss Drummond (who was entirely strange) and Margaret were almost looked over. They crossed over to a stand near the entrance, which was filled with choice flowering plants, and stood admiring these while they waited for the others to join them.

The grounds were thronged with a brilliant company, and still people kept on arriving. Everybody of any consequence at all was there, including most of the richer townsfolk, with their wives and daughters, gayest among the gay.

Presently Margaret was conscious of some one whispering behind her. She caught the words, "The

"MARGARET TURNED ROUND" (p. 121).

doctor's daughter," and listened attentively. "They showed it to me; I wanted ma to buy it. It was three pounds. Ma said it was twice too dear, because it's very common stuff, and there's no fit in those shop things," the whispering voice continued.

Margaret turned round with a flushed face, and glanced haughtily at the speaker. It was the daughter of their own grocer. The girl's eyes fell before Margaret's, and she turned away, conscious that her remarks had been heard. Margaret glanced at Miss Drummond to see whether she had understood, but that lady was still bending over the plants with a smiling face, apparently unconscious of Margaret's discomfiture.

Presently the band began to play, and the visitors thronged to the portion of the grounds where it was stationed, promenading up and down the broad walks in little knots. Here there were general meetings and recognitions, and Margaret came in for a fair share of them. But she was conscious that all eyes were fixed upon her with critical glances, and more than once the slight look of surprise in the eyes of some of her mother's old friends caused her to blush uncomfortably, and she began heartily to wish she had never come. The day was fine, the music most inspiriting, the scene as gay a one as ever she had pictured it, but the enjoyment she had expected was wanting.

After a while Lady Monteith, who had been continually surrounded by her acquaintances, requested Dr. Crawford to go to a seat, as she began to feel fatigued.

They detached themselves from the gay groups, and found a garden seat under some distant trees. Here they rested, watching the company from afar, and enjoying the faint echoes of the band.

Lady Monteith suddenly turned to Margaret to ask her how she was enjoying it all, when, for the first time, apparently, she noticed her general appearance. "Why, Margaret!" she exclaimed sharply, "what have you been doing to yourself? You seem to me to have dressed up like an old woman cut shorter."

Margaret made no reply, but Lady Monteith was inexorable. "Stand up, and let me inspect you."

"It is not worth while," Margaret replied, endeavouring to get over the difficulty with a dash of the sauciness that had often stood her in good stead with the old lady before; "there are many worthier objects for your ladyship's inspection."

"That I do not doubt," Lady Monteith replied imperturbably. "Nevertheless, you are the object that I intend to inspect just now. Stand up."

Margaret obeyed reluctantly, seeing that she must give in sooner or later. Lady Monteith placed her gold eye-glasses before her eyes, and took a long and critical survey.

"I understand now," she said very deliberately, shifting her glance from one detail to another of Margaret's attire, "several very extraordinary remarks I have heard this afternoon. Dr. Crawford, will you see about our carriage? I feel a little overcome;" and

she leaned back against the back of the seat, with an expression of great annoyance.

"I suppose I cannot get away till the prizes have been given," Dr. Crawford replied, with a sigh, which showed how distasteful the whole scene was to him; "but I will put you into your carriage if you really wish, and follow you as soon as possible."

So it was arranged, and the ladies were soon on their way home. Margaret wanted to get out at her own door, but Lady Monteith would not hear of it. "Margaret must come home with her for some tea," she said, and as she was in the habit of always having her own way, Margaret went. The fact was that the old lady was determined to prolong Margaret's discomfiture as long as possible, in order to cure her of her silly, vain ways.

Miss Drummond was almost as uncomfortable as Margaret. When they were removing their bonnets, she came into her aunt's room and begged her to let the poor child go home, urging pathetically her motherless condition as an excuse for every folly.

"Nonsense!" Lady Monteith exclaimed briskly; "it is for her good. If I didn't like the girl I shouldn't trouble my head about her, but I know the sort of disposition she has. Mild measures are no use."

In the meantime, Margaret, who had only to remove her hat, for the lace scarf she wore was necessary to hide as much as possible the deficiencies of her dress, was impatiently waiting in the drawing-room. A letter

on Lady Monteith's writing-table caught her eye; the handwriting seemed so familiar. Every time she turned her head away the fascination of curiosity seemed to draw her eyes back, till at last she found herself trying to make out the words from where she sat. Was it "Margaret Crawford?" Yes, beyond a doubt. In her surprise she rose, and bent over the writing-table to read. The letter run thus :—

"DEAR LADY MONTEITH,—"Margaret Crawford has, I know, told you of my being in England, and I have very little doubt that you guessed at once who Pauline Hamilton was."

The sound of footsteps caused Margaret to start back guiltily, with a flushed face, as Lady Monteith herself entered the room.

"Well, Margaret," she said very coldly, "I never dreamed that your father's child would disgrace me as you have done to-day. One expected some sense from a tall, womanly-looking girl like you. Certainly the last thing one expected was that you should make yourself look utterly vulgar and contemptible with a parcel of cheap and common finery."

"Vulgar and contemptible are words I won't stand from any one!" began Margaret, with spirit; but Lady Monteith continued with quiet force—

"Stay, child, no tirade: that would be too unbecoming. Did you learn all these odd ways from your schoolfellow, Pauline Hamilton?"

"Pauline!" exclaimed Margaret contemptuously, her temper rapidly rising. "A poor, meek, dowdy little thing! You need never compare me to Pauline."

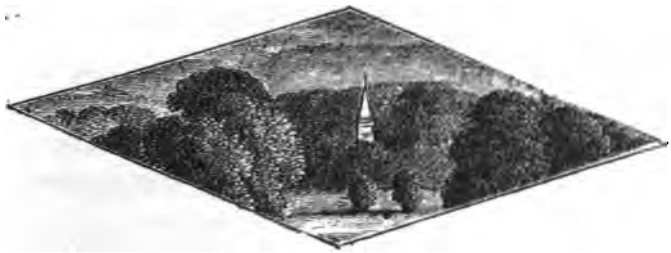
"Possibly not," returned Lady Monteith, in a tone Margaret could hardly understand. "I should say there was no comparison."

Something implied rather than expressed stung Margaret sharply. "I always suspected Pauline of being an impostor," she returned, with suppressed annoyance; "we all thought there was something very queer about her. I meant to warn you about her when I was at Miss Walmer's, for I found then that she was mixed up in some scheme about you."

"Indeed, indeed," said Lady Monteith, turning sharply away from Margaret to the window, where she stood looking out. "Pauline Hamilton is a meek, dowdy, ill-dressed impostor," she said presently, in a musing sort of way. "I shan't forget that, Margaret; don't you either, or I may have to remind you of it. You can go home."

Margaret was nothing loth. Lady Monteith in this humour was most unpleasant, and Margaret herself was too ruffled to care for any one's company. Once in her room, she tore off the unfortunate dress, and flung her hat with its staring white flowers across the room. A little piece of paper on her dressing-table she had not noticed before. It was the bill, and the words of the grocer's daughter came to her mind. Yes, sure enough, the cost of the dress was about three pounds,

which she was to pay the best way she could. Her mind ran from this to Lady Monteith's inexplicable conduct and Pauline. There was something very mysterious about it. She remembered, too, with some confusion, that Pauline had been kind to her. Could that have been to blind her eyes, and prevent her from warning Lady Monteith. What could Pauline have to do with that haughty lady? Then somehow Margaret's mind ran back to that letter of her mother's, which she had locked away and almost forgotten. Strange that she should think of it just now. Could it be by any strange means that this Pauline would turn out to be her bitter enemy?



CHAPTER XIV.

MARGARET ENCOUNTERS DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES.

MARGARET did not leave her bedroom any more that evening. Her father had gone into Lady Monteith's for some tea, and would probably hear a glowing account of his daughter's delinquencies. Moreover, Margaret's spirit was too perturbed for her to wish to meet her father. So she sat and pondered over the adverse circumstances that had risen up to annoy her in spite of the independence and freedom from control for which she had always longed.

In the morning she was met by fresh worry where she least expected it. She had quite determined to sell her dress to the old pedlar, so that her mind was

quite easy on that score. She tried to think she did not care for Lady Monteith's displeasure, though secretly she did very much, and prided herself upon being a favourite of her capricious friend more than anything else.

So she had persuaded herself into a happier frame of mind, and was dressing in leisurely fashion about half-past nine o'clock, when a hasty tap came at her door.

It was Mary, flushed and indignant. "I leave this house this day month!" she said. "I've put up with it till I can't put up with it longer."

"What's the matter now?" Margaret was surprised into asking.

"Why, the master's been complaining," exclaimed Mary. "He says that Lady Monteith told him the children were a disgrace to whoever had the care of them, and he asked why Morris hadn't made up their summer frocks and jackets. He didn't even know that Morris had left, and I told him right out that I couldn't do all the work I did and mend and make for the children too; and as for new frocks and jackets, it would be soon enough to think of making them when the stuff was bought. The master was angry, and so was I, for its strikes me there's that going on in the house that he doesn't know about, and so I'd rather leave it."

"No wonder papa was angry if you spoke like that," said Margaret coldly.

"I'm sorry if I was rude to *him*," Mary replied penitently.

Such an insult as this Margaret couldn't take. She had thought at first of asking Mary to stay, but now she simply said, in her own haughty fashion, "You *will* leave at the end of the month."

Mary retreated to the nursery, where she relieved her over-wrought feelings by a good cry. She was fond of the children, sorry to leave a place where she had once been very happy, and already almost inclined to regret her burst of temper. "But there's no standing Miss Margaret's ways," she said to herself; "and I should have to be doing it again to-morrow."

Margaret was very annoyed. "I quite meant to have been down early this morning," she said to herself; "if I had, this wouldn't have happened." We may here mention that Margaret had quite meant to get up earlier every morning for the last three months, but had never done it yet.

She went down stairs and ate her solitary breakfast. Before she had well finished it Elizabeth came in to tell her that an old woman was waiting to see her on business.

"It is quite right," answered Margaret, "though she needn't have come so early. Run up and get my room clear. I will speak to her there."

Elizabeth hesitated. "If you'll excuse me, Miss Margaret, I know about that old body. She's no good. She goes round to all the houses asking the servants if

they've got anything to sell—bits of jewellery, or things of that sort. How should servants have jewellery to sell? She persists in coming, though I've told her she's not wanted."

"She has come this time on business," Margaret remarked decisively.

After a little time Margaret went up to her room, and had the old woman brought up. "I've got a dress to sell you," she began eagerly, taking out her new "costume" and spreading it on the bed.

The old woman turned it over, rubbed the fabric between her fingers, pulled the trimming, turned it over again and again, all the while eyeing it with a sort of supercilious smile.

"I'll give you five shillings for it," she said presently.

"Five shillings!" cried Margaret. "Why, it cost me three pounds, and it's quite new."

"So it may have done," the old woman replied imperturbably. "It wasn't never worth it, though, and it's been hacked and chopped about till it's no good for selling again. No one 'ud buy it. I shall have to pick it to pieces and sell it for children's frocks, or rags, perhaps. I've made you a generous offer, what I shall lose by myself. I don't really see how I can give you five. I'll give you four."

"Nonsense!" cried Margaret, angrily. "You'll give me ten, I know you will."

"I couldn't, my dear; nor no one else neither. If

ever I get five out of it I'll call myself a clever woman. But you've got something else, my dear? Perhaps I can strike a better bargain over some other left-off clothes."

Margaret, in despair, pulled out her merino dress. In the meantime the old creature was stuffing Margaret's costume into a dirty old sack she had kept folded up under her shawl.

"No, no!" said Margaret, turning round and perceiving her. "You were not to take that."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, my dear," said the old woman very deferentially. "I made a mistake; I was thinking you were going to let me have it."

She began pulling it out again; the rough handling and dirty sack had not improved it. Margaret saw with dismay that it looked a miserable, crushed, unwearable sort of thing. "Take it!" she exclaimed. "I can never wear it, so you must have it."

The old woman then proceeded to inspect the merino dress. "Now, this," she began—and Margaret's hopes rose high, "I could have given a real good price for if it hadn't been so spotted and torn about. What a pity, to be sure! Three shillings."

"You're an old cheat!" began Margaret; whereupon the woman turned out the contents of her sack upon the floor, and began marching with stately step and indignant face towards the door.

The bill forced itself before Margaret's mental vision.

"Stay," she exclaimed. "Let me show you some other things."

The old creature turned back with apparent reluctance. "I must have three pounds," said Margaret. "Now tell me what I must give you for that."

"Three pounds is a long sum," the old woman said dubiously. "I should have to turn over a good many things before I could make that. Have you got any children's clothes? I can give you a better price for them."

"I'll see," Margaret replied, and she went off to the children's wardrobe, to see what she could find. She came back with her arms full of small garments in various stages of dilapidation. "I'll give you a pound for these and the two dresses," the old woman said, with the air of one who makes a most wonderful proposal.

"But I must have three," said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear; you've got something more, I'm sure. Just think a minute. Now old bed-clothes are very useful, no matter how old. We poor folk are glad to patch 'em, though of course gentry like you wouldn't do such a thing."

"I wonder if there are any old sheets or things?" Margaret said, half to herself.

"You might run and see; there'd be no harm in doing that," persisted the old woman.

That was true enough, thought Margaret, so she went. Some of the sheets looked thin in places, and

to Margaret's prejudiced eyes thinner than they really were. She pulled out several, and brought them down in her arms. The old woman's eyes sparkled when she saw them—fine costly linen, of which she well knew the worth, though Margaret did not, nor had even a suspicion that turning them sides into middle, as housewives say, and cutting off the thin part would have rendered them useful for years to come.

"I'll give you a pound for those five," the old woman said, with her most liberal air.

"I can't let you have more than three," said Margaret. "These two are as good as new."

"Oh no, my dear, they've had many a year's wear. However, I'll say twenty-five for them."

"I must have the money," Margaret thought, and she let let them go.

"And now, dear, some of the gentleman's things to make up," suggested the crafty old woman.

For a third time Margaret went on a search; this time to her father's room. Several coats were hanging in the wardrobe, and others were lying folded in a drawer, among them two dress coats.

"I'm quite sure papa will never wear those again," she said, as she shook them out, "and they are spoiling here." Thus quieting her conscience, she went back with another armful.

At last she succeeded in getting the three pounds, but not before she had added many other things.

The old woman stuffed them all into her capacious

sack, and, no doubt very well pleased with her morning's work, prepared to depart.

"Come this way," whispered Margaret, peeping down the staircase; and then leading the way, she took her through the drawing-room into the garden, and finally let her out by the stable-yard gates.

But not before Elizabeth, talking to old Jacob in the kitchen-garden, had espied her and her bulky sack, and guessed at the truth. "Miss Margaret, dear," she said, running up to her before she could get out of the way, "I do hope you haven't been selling things to that old woman. She's a known cheat, and while she pretends to be so fair, she'll rob you through thick and thin. Whatever had she got in that sack?"

Margaret grew very red. "It's nothing to do with you, Elizabeth," she stammered.

"But it is to do with me," Elizabeth continued earnestly. "She's not a safe person to have round about, and you mustn't let her come. And as for selling your things to her, what would your dear mamma have said? If you were in a strait any way, I'd willingly have lent you the money myself."

Margaret turned away, and would hear no more. Her conscience already was upbraiding her so greatly that the addition of Elizabeth's reproaches was too much for her. One thing she would see about at once: she would go and pay for the tiresome dress before she was tempted to do anything else with the money, and

then perhaps she would be able to forget the whole affair.

While she was gone Elizabeth went up stairs, bent upon finding out what the old woman had carried away. She soon discovered the absence of a whole heap of the children's clothes, Margaret's dresses, and Dr. Crawford's coats.

"Dear, dear!" she kept on exclaiming at each fresh revelation, "this'll never do. That old creature'll get round her again, if it isn't put a stop to."

But what was her dismay when, a day or two afterwards, Mary reported that there were ever so many sheets missing from the linen-chest, and asked Elizabeth if she knew where they were.

Elizabeth guessed, but she said nothing to Mary. She went straight to Margaret, and taxed her with it. Margaret could not deny the charge, but angrily retorted that she was mistress, and if she choose to get rid of old worn-out things she should do so.

"But they weren't worn out," urged Elizabeth. "That's just it. Some of those sheets were worth more than thirty shillings, and the very worst one, when turned about, would make a good sheet for any of the smaller beds. The two best were only bought just before your mamma died, and were the finest and best that can be had."

"It isn't true," Margaret exclaimed in confused surprise.

"It is, indeed, miss," Elizabeth continued; "and

really, unless you will promise me that you'll tell your papa all about it, and not do such a thing again, I couldn't stay in the house. The master might suspect me of stealing the things."

"You needn't think that," Margaret replied; "and I shall certainly not promise you anything."

"Well, if you won't tell him, miss, I must," Elizabeth replied firmly.

"But you sha'n't!" cried Margaret angrily. "If you do you sha'n't stay here."

"I've been thinking lately whether I could stay under any circumstances," Elizabeth said sadly. "It's only I promised her that's gone that I'd always stay faithful; but there's a great deal that makes me very unhappy, and I'm that torn both ways that I'm quite wretched," she added, almost tearfully.

"Look here, Elizabeth," said Margaret, with a touch of compunction, for really she was fond of Elizabeth, only she did not like her interference, "if you say nothing about it to papa, I'll promise you that wicked old cheat sha'n't come again."

"It isn't enough, Miss Margaret," Elizabeth replied. "She's deep, and she'd get hold of you other wheres. And, besides, the master ought to be told."

"Nonsense, Elizabeth!" Margaret replied impatiently. "Papa knows nothing about sheets; he'd never trouble his head about them."

"That's as bad as the old woman herself," said

Elizabeth reproachfully. "No, miss, your papa must be told."

"What a determined old thing you are!" Margaret exclaimed, with great annoyance. "If you're bent upon being so spiteful, the sooner you make up your mind to leave us the better;" and Margaret turned away abruptly, angry with Elizabeth, angry with herself, and with all the untoward circumstances that were harassing her.

As she turned towards the wide-open French window she noticed a long shadow across the gravel path in front of it. She darted forward angrily to see who had dared to stand behind the window and listen, when she came suddenly face to face with her father.

CHAPTER XV.

DIFFICULTIES AND DEFIANCE.

MARGARET never remembered to have seen such an expression on her father's face. There was so much disappointment, such a sadness and weariness written there, that the girl's eyes fell, and her face became crimson with a burning sense of shame and remorse. But indeed, so far, Margaret's haughty disposition had no idea of true penitence. If she had never been found out she would have been very little troubled. She was sorry now at the *result* of her selfish conduct, not really penitent for having so acted; and there is a wide

difference. The moment her father began to speak all her old defiance was roused. She would not own her faults humbly, and promise amendment: a sure sign that there was no real penitence.

Dr. Crawford called to Elizabeth as she was about to retreat.

"Stay," he exclaimed. "I wish you to hear what I have to say."

Elizabeth came forward then, looking confused and pained. She feared that her master was very angry.

"I hope, Elizabeth," he said, in his own quiet grave way, "that you will be able to forget the ungrateful treatment that you have received at the hands of one of my family. I have always reposed the greatest confidence in you, and do so now more than ever. You will not, I hope, think of leaving us."

"Not while I can be of any service to you," Elizabeth replied earnestly, "and thanking you for your kindness, sir. It would be unbecoming of me to offer to leave while you wished me to stay."

This remark was in allusion to a past event. Dr. Crawford had found this woman almost starving ten years before, when on one of his professional visits to a house in the poorest part of a neighbouring village. She had been deserted by her husband, and was so ill and poor that no one would give her employment. The doctor had first cured her, and then taken her into his own house, which act of kindness had furnished him

with a servant whose faithfulness and devotion could hardly be equalled.

"Margaret," he said, turning to her very sadly, "your mother was troubled about you before she died, and I am troubled about you. Have you been wilfully deceiving me? You have no mother. What can I do for you? I believed that your loss would have developed all the womanly qualities I know you possess. I am grieved, child, I am grieved."

The last words were spoken hurriedly, and with head bent down, as if, in truth, the sense of grief and shame were overwhelming. Perhaps Margaret was unwilling to show how deeply she was stung. She answered quickly, "You believe everything that is bad of me, papa. My very straightforwardness gets me into trouble. I am at least honest."

At this moment Elizabeth glanced at her, and Margaret's old excuse died away on her tongue. For the first time she realised that she had been deceiving herself.

"I must think about this," Dr. Crawford said, unheedingly. "I have been mistaken in leaving you to yourself; some alteration must be made."

"What do you mean, papa?" Margaret asked quickly; but he replied quietly, "I do not know; I must think."

For a short time after this interview Margaret honestly tried to govern herself and do better. No one was better qualified to hold the reins of govern-

ment if that unfortunate idol, self, had been dethroned. Margaret was naturally active and energetic, and endowed with a perception of things, generally, far beyond her years. If she had been bent on doing so, she could have soon mastered all the numerous details of housekeeping under so patient and experienced an instructress as Elizabeth; but at present Margaret's mind was filled with the love of power and authority, not the welfare of those whom circumstances had made dependent, in a measure, on her loving care and forethought.

Unfortunately, therefore, Margaret soon drifted back into her old ways. Her father said nothing more, and after a short time she began to think he had forgotten it. She was rather more conciliatory in her behaviour to Elizabeth, but feeling sure that the faithful old cook would not approve of many of her doings, she took good care that they should be hidden from her. Mary left in due course, and Margaret filled her place and Morris's with two young girls who, she thought, would render her more absolute obedience. These did not stay long, and were replaced by others, who in their turn soon grew tired of Margaret's capricious and dictatorial ways. The children were very unhappy with these constant changes; the care and neatness of the house suffered greatly. Many valuable articles were broken and destroyed, either from carelessness or by neglect, and any experienced eye might have detected that Lady Monteith was not far wrong when she declared that the house was going to rack and ruin.

But so far as Lady Monteith was concerned, she was not likely to see how things were going, for she never came inside the house now. She was still as friendly as ever with the doctor, but Margaret might not have been in existence, so completely did she seem to have forgotten her. This was the more noticeable because Margaret had for many years been almost like a grandchild to the old lady, pouring out tea for her, transmitting her orders, adding up her accounts, and amusing her with the general news of the neighbourhood, staying very often in her house for weeks together, and always looked upon as Lady Monteith's one favourite—the secret, perhaps, of much of Margaret's haughtiness.

But since the day of the flower-show the old lady had never even inquired after her former favourite, which so nettled Margaret that she was quite resolved not to see Lady Monteith until she came to seek her, which seemed little likely to happen, for several months had already passed.

Miss Drummond came occasionally, but both avoided the subject. Margaret grew rather to like this lady, who was very gentle in her manner, and apparently kept her eyes shut to all that she was not wanted to see.

"Miss Drummond takes a very kind interest in you, Margaret," her father remarked to her one day. "She would always help you, child, I am sure."

And it was evident Miss Drummond did so. She

spoke soon after to Margaret about her own education, urging upon her how necessary it was to continue it, offering at the same time to give her any assistance she could, even to arranging a system of studying alone or together with her. But Margaret listened impatiently; she had so many other things to think of, she declared, though what these were it was difficult to know. Miss Drummond became very intimate with the younger children, who grew very fond of her. Indeed, Margaret, coming in from a walk, found her more than once in the nursery, reading aloud some enthralling story, the children gathered round her open-eyed and open-mouthed, and little Gracie on her lap, leaning her golden head lovingly against her shoulder.

Somehow or other such sights as these did not please Margaret, and her manner to Miss Drummond was correspondingly cold. Once she attempted the story-reading herself, but her little sisters and brothers looked at her in surprise, and told her with childish frankness she "read nasty"—not like Auntie Bessie. Margaret shut up the book in a fit of jealous anger, and did not repeat the experiment.

But as time went on Miss Drummond's offences grew more numerous. She made and embroidered the two little girls two dainty frocks when they first put off their black ones. When the poor mites got into a more dilapidated condition than usual, Auntie Bessie was always ready with a set of beautiful little night-dresses

or pinafores, or whatever it might be that they wanted, which she had made with her own hands, "just because she was so fond of making children's little garments," she would tell Margaret. Her skilful fingers would concoct for them wonderful bonnets, and, indeed, she was always doing something for one or other.

Margaret never could quite understand how she had become so intimate with them. Whenever she came to stay with Lady Monteith—and that was pretty often—she was their one and constant visitor, even on Sunday, when she usually ran over in the afternoon to read the little ones a Scripture story and talk to them about it. Margaret was rather driven into a friendship with her from the fact that she had no other friend.

When first she came home from school many of her mother's old friends had come to see her, and those who had children about the same age had invited her frequently to their houses. But after a while all this gradually stopped, for the fact was that "Dr. Crawford's daughter" began to be talked about as an opinionated, selfish, ill-mannered girl, who was not considered a suitable companion. She was therefore left very much to herself, and at times was very wretched in consequence, for she more than suspected that she was shunned.

One Saturday morning early in the New Year—the second after her mother's death—Margaret was adding up her week's bills. She was sitting with

knitted brows, for there was an unusually large pile before her, and the sum total was unexpected and alarming. The fact was that the weekly bills had for a long time past developed an uncomfortable habit of growing steadily week by week. Her father had called her attention to this several times, but still they kept on growing. So Margaret, seeing her father was vexed, had several times told the tradespeople, when a bill had been unusually large, to send in only a portion of it, leaving the rest to be paid at another time. She had, no doubt, some plan in her own mind by which she supposed she would be able to clear up these odds and ends of bills; but, at any rate, she never did, and forgot all about them. Moreover, the tradespeople had fallen in with her plan rather too well, and of their own accord kept back a portion of all bills that were over large, without saying anything about it.

Now all these had come in together, and a formidable-looking array they were. Moreover, a "few little things" which Margaret had ordered now and then from the draper's, meaning to ask her father for the money when she found an opportunity, had, to her blank astonishment, added up into a long bill. Altogether, it was by no means a pleasing revelation.

What was to be done? Margaret sat revolving various schemes in her mind, and was obliged to dismiss them all as impracticable. Only two things were open to her: to ask these people to wait, and endeavour

to pay them gradually, a little at a time, as occasion offered, or to tell her father the exact state of affairs.

She was still debating what she should do when she heard the surgery door open and her father's footsteps coming towards the dining-room. Hastily she thrust the bills into the table-drawer until she should see an opportunity of bringing them forward.

He came and sat down beside her with a troubled face, and took up the housekeeping book in an absent sort of way. There was something wrong, Margaret saw at once, and the thought of those other bills remained unpleasantly in her memory.

"I have been comparing the house accounts with those of two years ago," he said presently, "and I find they are half as much again. Look here," and he drew from his pocket a book written in Mrs. Crawford's handwriting, and pointed to the sum totals, which week after week were far less than those in Margaret's book. "This must be altered," he said gravely. "You are but a child, but circumstances have put you in a position beyond your years. I will therefore tell you that I am not as well off as I was. My practice has fallen off very much in the last two years, since Dr. Jones came into the place. Before, there was no choice, for there was no one else to go to, but all that is at an end. It is a question of rivalry now, and that I have always disliked. There is every need for care, instead of which I find that my expenses are greater, far greater, in every direction.

Do you understand, child, that this must end now—at once?"

"But, papa," queried Margaret, "surely you are not poor."

"No, thank God," her father replied. "That is what I wish to prevent. The bills must be kept down to five pounds a week. Tell Elizabeth that, and she will manage accordingly."

Alas! for those other bills. What was to be done?

The matter settled itself. The tradespeople thought they had waited long enough, and perhaps suspecting some mismanagement, sent in their accounts to Dr. Crawford through the post, instead of delivering them with the weekly accounts, as they had previously done. Thus they fell into his hands without Margaret getting even the credit of having confessed her difficulties.

He was a man of few words, and perhaps he spoke least on the subjects he felt most deeply.

Margaret drew a breath of relief when he simply said to her, "Are there any more revelations of this sort to come?" And she answered, with almost cheerful alacrity, "No, indeed, papa, that is all," which was true enough, so far as bills were concerned, though, could Dr. Crawford have known the spoiling and destruction which had been going on during the past two years, he might well have been dismayed.

As it was, he simply sent for Elizabeth, and said to her in his quiet manner, "Elizabeth, I wish you to attend to all housekeeping concerns for the present. Be

as careful as you can, and bring all bills straight to me."

But this was the greatest indignity, Margaret considered, that could have been put upon her, and though she hardly dared to complain openly, she showed very plainly in her manner how annoyed she was. Her father, who noticed everything, was reproaching himself that he had allowed so young a girl such complete liberty, which he saw now had been harmful to her, and anxiously considering how best to rectify the mistake.

The whole matter seemed likely to blow over quietly, as so many others had done, but Margaret was quite determined it should not. She would not rest satisfied until she had got back the position she had lost. But it was in vain she sulked or scowled, or looked injured and miserable; her father took no heed. While she was discussing with herself how best to set about this difficult task, she was astonished at receiving a new and unexpected overthrow of all her plans in the following note. It was in the handwriting of Miss Drummond:—

"DEAR MARGARET,—We have known each other some little time—long enough, I think, to have grown attached to each other."

"There is something out of the way coming," thought Margaret, "or she'd never begin like that."

"You know how dearly I love your little sisters and brothers, and how happy it would make me to do anything for them or for

you. Well, dear Margaret, I want you to be the first person to know that I am coming very soon to live entirely with you."

"What does she mean?" cried Margaret, starting angrily. "What impertinence! The idea of her coming to live here and mistress it over me! I'll take care that she sha'n't."

"And I hope and believe," the letter went on, "that we shall be very happy together."

"We shouldn't, though," thought Margaret.

"You will be to me," she continued reading, "like a young and dearly-loved sister; we shall be able to study, and work, and walk, and do many other things together. My little darling, will, I hope, learn to look upon me as a sort of 'new mamma.'"

"I see what she means now," cried Margaret, flinging the letter down as if it had stung her. "How dare she?" she exclaimed to herself. "Mamma, indeed! Never! And I'm to be her younger sister. That's very clever; but I see through it. Coming here to take mamma's place. How can papa think of such a thing? But she never shall; I dislike her already for the thought; and she has been coming here so freely all this while, and I never guessed what she had in her mind. It's wicked of papa to forget poor mamma so quickly, and I'll tell him so. Oh, mamma, mamma! was it of this creature that you spoke when you said I had an enemy? Yes, that must be it. My enemy and yours, poor dead mother! And papa's as bad. He's his own enemy and mine as well."

In her excitement Margaret jumped up and began hastily walking about her room; resting every now and then with her head leant back against the wall, as on that day when she received the news of her mother's death. Her face was pale with excitement, her eyes flashing angrily.

Presently she heard her father coming up stairs. Catching up the letter, she ran out of the room and confronted him. "What does she mean by all this?" she cried, thrusting it into his hand.

Her father drew her gently into his dressing-room, and putting her into a chair, sat down beside her. He could, no doubt, make allowances for the passionate disposition which inflicted so much self-torture, and for this reason chose to be tender rather than severe. "She means that I have asked her and she has promised to come, and be a mother to my motherless children," he said quietly, but firmly, "and to bring back order and happiness to this unhappy house. We ought to be very grateful to her, Margaret. If she were not so good and gentle she would never have undertaken so difficult a task."

Margaret turned away from him abruptly. "It is scarcely more than two years since mamma died," was all she said.

An expression of intense pain came into her father's face. He might have told this child of his, who had all along been so cruelly thoughtless, that ten years would not measure the space of time that he had lived in her two years.

"If my daughter had been a little less selfish," he said, with a touch of sternness, "I might not have had to say that they have been two years of discomfort and misery."

"It is all Lady Monteith's doing," cried Margaret, falling back upon her grievance. "She has done it to annoy me, for she has disliked me lately."

"Margaret," said her father, very firmly, "never let me hear you speak like that again. And I can only say that if you do not make up your mind to behave properly to Miss Drummond, who only wishes to be kind to you, I shall have to send you to school again. She, I know, wishes you to remain here and study with her; but if I see that you are making her in any way unhappy, I will not allow it—you will leave home."

"Yes, I will," said Margaret, under her breath. "As surely as she enters this house I will go out of it; but not in the way they suppose."

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW PAULINE'S FATE WAS DECIDED.

IF Margaret Crawford had any ground for her suspicion that her old schoolfellow, Pauline Hamilton, had some evil influence over her life, and was, in fact, the enemy against whom her mother had sought to warn her, there is no doubt that Margaret herself had proved to be Pauline's best friend.

Not intentionally, though, and that was the strangest part of it. She had served Pauline a good turn with Lady Monteith, and as yet Lady Monteith herself, Pauline, and even Margaret, were quite ignorant of the fact.

Margaret had often wondered what had been the object of that letter she had seen lying on Lady Mon-

teith's davenport, and what had been the effect of the warning she had given the old lady.

But her curiosity remained unsatisfied, for since that day she had never entered Monteith House, or even spoken to her old friend, except in the most casual way.

The letter which so excited Margaret was a very simple one. It began by stating that no doubt Lady Monteith had heard from Margaret Crawford of her being in England, and guessed who she was. It further explained the misfortune that had befallen her in the shape of ill-health, which threatened to upset all the long-cherished plans of enabling her to complete her education in England.

Pauline went on to state that it would be the greatest grief to her to return to her parents without accomplishing this object, and for this reason she had written to ask the advice and help of the only person in England upon whose kindness she had any excuse for trespassing. She had always intended, she said, to ask Lady Monteith's permission to come and see her before she returned to Australia; but she had not wished to do so until a few years' residence in England had given her the training that she knew she wanted.

This was the substance of the letter, and simple though it was, nothing could well have disturbed the old lady more. She read it again and again, examining the handwriting, carefully weighing each sentence, and considering for hours together what sort of disposition

it seemed to betray on the part of the writer. She had indeed suspected who Pauline Hamilton might be, and from Margaret's description, made up her mind neither to inquire nor to think about her. Yet, at the same time, Margaret's haughty contempt had angered her greatly. However, she had dismissed the girl from her mind, until the arrival of this letter had aroused her again to the fact of Pauline's existence. At first she thrust the letter from her in bitter anger.

"She has scented out my money, like her precious father," she thought indignantly. "Every one is alike; there is not a soul in this world who would not gladly see me in my grave if they knew they would have my money to spend—not a soul who cares for me, not one!" And the poor, proud heart, always so stern and haughty to the world, melted into pitiful tears of lonely misery.

She took up the letter again, trying to read underneath what was written a desire on the part of the writer to place herself in the most favourable light before the eyes of the rich Lady Monteith. But indeed she could find nothing of the kind—the letter was almost abrupt, no allusion to any claims which the old lady acknowledged she might well have made. The one demand was "advice and help" as to how she should continue her education under the awkward circumstances that had arisen. For a moment a great yearning came over the forlorn old heart to see this girl, whose mother had disappeared out of her life for so many, many years.

She almost inclined to send for her. The child should no longer be punished for the offences of her parents.

But the softer feeling was rudely brushed away by others. First, Margaret's description of her: "dowdy, uneducated, without any notion of civilised life, and a meek, insignificant little creature, born to be put upon." Lady Monteith remembered very distinctly that last item, for it was the character of all others that most annoyed her. She liked a person with spirit, and for this reasons he had taken a great fancy to Margaret Crawford, even intending to leave the girl a large portion of her money. But with what result? only to find that the child she had thought would be as kin to her was eaten up with selfishness and vanity, and had no affection for any one but herself, for Lady Monteith was one of those intolerant persons who could not patiently and gently correct. Indeed, had she but known it, selfishness and pride had wrecked her own life. She would never again, she told herself, run the risk of disappointment; she would neither seek nor give affection to any one; and Pauline Hamilton might go her own way, for she would have nothing to do with her.

This was the conclusion she had arrived at when the circumstance of Margaret seeing Pauline's letter altered everything.

Margaret had called her an impostor, and Lady Monteith knew why, for Margaret had long ago told her how Pauline had betrayed that she knew something of Lady Monteith, though when Margaret had questioned

her she had at once confessed that she had never even seen her. That was true enough; but she might have told Margaret of her connection with her, and have made it a means of improving her position at school. This she had never done, Lady Monteith knew, for she had carefully sounded Margaret on this point. She had borne all sorts of slights rather than do that; and Lady Monteith greatly approved of the self-dependence that had rejected the temptation to shield her own poverty under the boast of wealthy connections. And when Lady Monteith recollected what Pauline Hamilton's connections really were, and heard Margaret Crawford, a girl not even her equal, calmly calling her an impostor, she could scarcely control her anger and indignation.

In her resentment at Margaret's impertinence she formed a sudden resolution, which she proceeded to carry out at once. When she had again cooled down a little she began to regret her precipitancy, but the recollection of Margaret's remarks so annoyed her that she had only to dwell on them for a few minutes to bring back all the old feelings.

Pauline little guessed what influences had been at work to produce such a letter as the one she received in reply to hers. She hardly knew whether to be more pleased at the provision made for her, or sorry at the haughtiness which the letter displayed. It ran thus:—

"*Monteith House.*

"I will not say 'Dear Pauline,' for I do not know you, and

it would be untrue to say you are dear to me. Margaret Crawford has spoken of you, and you are right in supposing that I guessed who you were. Her description gave me no desire to make any use of the knowledge, but other circumstances have caused me to decide to make to you the following offer.

"You can be entered at a thoroughly good boarding-school, in any locality the doctor who is attending you may consider desirable (you will procure from him a statement on the subject to send me), for a year, for which I will pay the full fees, not exceeding £100 per annum. The sum your parents are now paying for you can go to augment your own pocket-money, out of which I shall require you to purchase all small articles of your wardrobe. I wish you to have a decent outfit, quite plain, but fit for a lady's child. As Miss Walmer seems kindly disposed, perhaps she will see to this for you. I shall be pleased if she will also undertake to select the school. I hereby authorise you to have all bills for this outfit sent to me, and made out in my name. I do not wish to see you now. You may write to me twice during the year to report progress, and if I find it such as pleases me, you can then pay a visit to Monteith House, when I shall form my own opinion of you.

"BARBARA MONTEITH."

CHAPTER XVII.

MARGARET'S RECEPTION OF HER STEPMOTHER.

"WHY, dear heart, Miss Margaret, you're never going to church in that old black frock?"

"Yes, I am," Margaret replied gloomily; "and if I had a shabbier one I'd put it on."

Elizabeth looked mournfully at Margaret. "It is a pity that she makes herself so stiff and disagreeable," she said to herself, with a sigh. "She might have been her father's right hand."

Margaret went down stairs looking the picture of long-suffering misery. Edith and Gracie were waiting below, prettily dressed in simple white frocks with blue sashes, and dainty little blue and white

"MARGARET WENT DOWN STAIRS" (p. 157).

bonnets, the work of their "new mamma's" fingers. After to-day she would really be a mother to them.

Dr. Crawford looked at Margaret in surprise. "Why, child, you must make haste and change your frock," he said.

"I am not going to change it," Margaret replied rebelliously. "I am wearing mourning for poor mamma."

"Then," said her father, turning abruptly away, "you will wear it in your own bedroom."

Margaret walked away without a word, and locked herself up in her own room, where she remained for the rest of the day, seeing no one. After a while the village bells began to chime, but Margaret stuffed her fingers into her ears and would not hear them. The sweet sounds filled her with bitterness; they seemed to tell of her overthrow, and the triumph of her "enemy," as she habitually thought of Miss Drummond now. "She shall get no welcome from me," Margaret said to herself over and over again. "What business has papa to put a stranger over me? But I will never give way to her. She was not wanted here, and she might have known it."

With such bitter and selfish reflections Margaret passed the day, fanning her annoyance and vexation into the flame of open rebellion.

Elizabeth, seeing that she was really making herself very unhappy, tried to reason with her.

"It seems hard, dearie," she said tenderly, "but

you must try to think of your poor papa's loneliness, and be thankful that he will have some one to cheer him up a bit. I'm sure it was a sorry sight to see him going about so broken-down and lonesome-looking. And you know, missy, she's a very gentle, good creature. I'm sure she came and talked to me so humbly, and said that I was always to tell her how things had been done, and she knew she could never fill the place of the dear mistress, but that she wanted to try to make everybody happy so much."

"You're soon won round!" cried Margaret sharply. "I haven't one friend, you are all my enemies," she added bitterly.

It was in vain Elizabeth tried to soothe, or to reason, or to reproach. Nothing would bring Margaret to think kindly of the change; and the kind-hearted old cook's heart misgave her when the day arrived on which Dr. Crawford and his new wife were to return from a short stay in the country.

She had been bustling about for several days beforehand, full of important preparations. Margaret kept principally in her bedroom, fretting and brooding over her troubles, and arranging all sorts of schemes of opposition to the new mistress of the house, so that, although she gave no help, neither did she offer any hindrance to Elizabeth's arrangements.

That worthy soul had risen up early and sat up late, turning out everything, and cleaning all round, about everywhere.

She was up with the lark on the day that they were expected back, putting up fresh white curtains in all the rooms, preparing dainty, tempting dishes for the travellers, and endeavouring to make the house—which had, alas! been so sadly neglected—present as pleasing an appearance as possible to the eyes of its new mistress.

"It's the best thing the master could have thought of," she said gladly to old Jacob. "The house sadly wanted a head, and now it'll have one; but it misgives me that Miss Margaret 'll lead her a life, poor thing!"

Old Jacob had brought in a basketful of his choicest blooms, and some pretty plants in pots for the drawing-room and hall.

"Now, Miss Margaret, dear, if you'll just arrange the flowers for me," Elizabeth said coaxingly. "That's work more fit for your fingers than my rough ones, and you've got such pretty taste."

"If I touch them it will be to make a grave-wreath," Margaret replied.

"You can do that, too," Elizabeth replied soothingly, "and it would be a kind thought, though you know you never did it before. But, dear Miss Margaret, I'm sure there's no one was fonder of your mamma than me, but I believe that she would be glad to think that her little ones were going to be well cared for, and everything looked after properly. It's what she would have wished."

"It was my place, and she has robbed me of it!" Margaret exclaimed resentfully.

"You weren't able to fill it, you know," Elizabeth felt bound to say; but Margaret would not hear. She turned away, very much offended, leaving Elizabeth to arrange the flowers as best she might.

At last the hour arrived for the carriage to be despatched to the station, and Elizabeth, who was very anxious to give the new mistress a hearty welcome, stationed the stable-boy at the gates to watch for its reappearance. The children were dressed in spotless white frocks, and Elizabeth had instructed the other maids to don their best attire, and put a bright ribbon in their caps in honour of the occasion. Presently Johnny came running in to announce that they were in sight, whereupon Elizabeth hastily gathered together the household in the large, old-fashioned hall.

All but Margaret, who would give no reply to the messenger sent to tell her that her father was just coming. Elizabeth flew up to the room, but with no better success. "I am in bed," Margaret called out grumpily, "and I mean to stay there." So Elizabeth was fain to hope that the new wife would not notice Margaret's absence.

It was, on the whole, a pleasant smiling group that greeted the eyes of the travellers as soon as the door opened, and Mrs. Crawford—formerly Miss Drummond—returned the greetings of children and servants with evident gratitude. Elizabeth, anxious to cover Mar-

garet's absence, hastily led the way to the drawing-room, where she had tea and coffee, and cake and wine in readiness to be partaken of until the elaborate meal she had prepared could be served.

But Mrs. Crawford's eyes had missed Margaret's tall, womanly figure at once, and she was silently grieving about it, though she would say nothing, for she did not wish to vex those who were showing her so much kindness.

The unpleasant matter could not long be deferred. Little Gracie, very happily munching a biscuit by her new mamma's side, presently remarked—

"Margaret says you are not our mamma, and if we say 'mamma' we shall be very wicked, and bad things'll happen to us. And she says she don't like you, and she won't ever speak to you if she can help it."

"Where is Margaret?" her father asked, while the new mamma's eyes filled with tears for a moment.

"'She's gone to bed," answered truthful Gracie, "because she said she didn't want to see 'mamma.'"

Dr. Crawford looked intensely annoyed. His wife said hastily, "Do not fear for me; I shall win her in time, and then she will love me as much as she dislikes me now." Then she drew the little girls to her, and kissed them, and asked them to try and love her, which they were quite ready to promise.

But when she was alone in her room removing her

travelling dress, the tears came back freely. She had desired to make this girl happy, and bring every kind of good into her life, and with this knowledge she had felt so sure of speedily winning her affection. It was hard to be so misunderstood and opposed.

She went softly up to Margaret's door and turned the handle, but it was fast locked. Then she gently knocked. No answer was vouchsafed, and Mrs. Crawford was obliged to turn away disappointed. For the present, however, she kept her own counsel, endeavouring to hide her mortification from those who were so anxiously watching her. And there was plenty to distract everybody's attention this evening, for the village band had turned out in strong force to do honour to the occasion, and had been marshalled on to the lawn by Elizabeth with much secret satisfaction, so that they might provide an accompaniment of music to the banquet she had provided. And then, of course, they had to be thanked and provided with some supper, and there were many cheers for the Doctor—who was deservedly a favourite—and his new wife. With all this excitement Margaret was almost forgotten by every one but Mrs. Crawford herself.

However, when on the next morning Margaret did not appear, and Mrs. Crawford was obliged to confess that she had tried to go into her room both last night and again this morning, and had been peremptorily refused, Dr. Crawford thought it high time to interfere. He sent a message that unless Margaret came out of her

room in half an hour he would send for a man to force the lock.

This had the effect of making her open the door; but she still refused to get up, declaring that she felt ill. Mrs. Crawford begged her father not to interfere at present, but to let her try what she could do by herself.

She found Margaret looking pale, heavy-eyed, and sulky. It was quite evident that the girl had grieved and fretted a great deal, and Mrs. Crawford, putting it down to a deep love for her own mother, which she respected and sympathised with, was prepared to be very gentle.

"Dear Margaret," she said, laying her hand on the girl's tossed hair, "I have not come here to bring you sorrow, but rather to try and make you happy. I know you loved your mother very dearly, and I never want you to forget that love for one moment, or to think that I expect you to regard me in the same way. Only think of me as a friend, always ready to help and sympathise in all your difficulties. Get up now, and come with me to see some pretty things I have brought home with me, and you will soon forget your headache."

"I do not want to see them," said Margaret shortly; "I want to be left alone."

"But that's just what I can't let you be. I want your company."

"That's not true," Margaret replied abruptly; "and if it is, I don't want yours. Go to the children,

and teach them to forget their own mother, as they would have done already if it hadn't been for me. I am too old for that."

"It is the last thing I wish," Mrs. Crawford

"SHE FOUND MARGARET LOOKING PALE" (p. 167).

replied sadly. "Why will you so misunderstand me? Is it not possible to love and remember her, and give me a little love and kindness as well?"

"No," answered Margaret shortly.

"That is very cruel, Margaret; but I am sure you will not always say that. You must love me a little in time," Mrs. Crawford said wistfully. "And now,

dear, as your papa is inclined already to be vexed at your staying up here so long, you had better come down for a little while, at any rate."

"It is nothing to me now whether papa is vexed or pleased," Margaret replied coldly; "he does not care about me."

"How can you think anything so untrue?" Mrs. Crawford asked, almost in despair. "I will plead for you to be left alone to-day, as I see you are not feeling well; but you know, dear, I cannot do so to-morrow—it would be deceiving your papa."

"You can do as you like," Margaret replied indifferently; and Mrs. Crawford left her, feeling terribly disheartened.

The next morning Margaret did not appear at breakfast-time, and Mrs. Crawford herself went up to urge her not to rouse her father's anger by continued wilfulness; but Margaret's room was empty, and no trace of her was to be found in the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE OR JEALOUSY?

MRS. CRAWFORD looked anxiously out of the window at the soaking rain which was pouring steadily down, and to all appearances had been doing so for many hours.

Much as she disliked doing so, Mrs. Crawford felt compelled to tell Margaret's father of her strange disappearance. It was too serious a matter for delay. "Do not be severe," she begged. "Let me give gentleness a fair trial."

"Margaret is the cause, and only cause, of her own unhappiness," Dr. Crawford replied, with a sigh. "But unfortunately it does not end with herself, for she makes every one in the house more or less unhappy. I have

been greatly to blame in giving her her own way so long, and now she must be shown some severity."

"Not yet, then," Mrs. Crawford pleaded; "she will associate it with my entrance here, and believe it is the result of my influence."

"You shall do as you please with her for the present," Dr. Crawford replied.

In the meantime a careful search had been made in every nook and corner of the rambling, old-fashioned garden, but without success. Mrs. Crawford entered the dining-room, duly equipped for a journey on foot through the rain.

"I have an idea where I shall find her," she said hopefully, "and I want to go on foot and alone. Margaret and I can have some breakfast together, if for once you will not mind having some alone," she added hastily, placing toast and egg and tea before her husband.

But Dr. Crawford pushed them aside as soon as she had gone, and walked to the window, looking out in great perturbation of mind.

Mrs. Crawford ran hastily up the road which led on at one part through a thickly-grown pine wood to the next village, quite three miles distant. But her destination was neither the village nor the wood. At the top of the gently-sloping hill she turned aside through some gates into a pretty country cemetery, bright now with a profusion of spring flowers dotting it about in all directions.

Here, as she suspected, she found Margaret, crouched

down on the damp ground, a miserable, draggled, woe-begone figure.

Mrs. Crawford came very softly across the soddened grass, and was by her side before she knew it. "My dear child," she said quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to find her there, "you should not stay out in the rain."

"Why have you come after me?" Margaret asked impatiently. "Can't I come even here without being followed and pryed after?"

"No, Margaret," Mrs. Crawford replied gently, but with decision. "I cannot allow you to come here at this hour of the morning without telling any one, nor in any case on such a wet morning."

"Am I to ask *your* permission?" Margaret asked haughtily.

"Or your father's," Mrs. Crawford returned.

"Look here," Margaret exclaimed, pointing to the words on the stone—"The beloved wife of Ernest Crawford," under which she had sketched in large pencilled letters—"Forgotten by all but Margaret."

"That is quite untrue," Mrs. Crawford remarked. "She is not forgotten by any of us, and I will never let her children forget her, if I can help it. Let me ask you, Margaret, how often you have visited her grave during the past year, or how often you have spoken to your little sisters of her?"

"You have no right to ask such a question," Margaret replied evasively.

"Can you truthfully say that the thought of causing me annoyance and pain was not the principal motive for your coming here at this extraordinary time?"

But Margaret would not reply, and Mrs. Crawford continued, "If this grave had not been visited by any one but the daughter of her who was laid here there would be some ground to say she was forgotten. Every time I came here last year I inquired at the lodge whether Miss Crawford had been lately, and the answer was always 'No.' So far as I could learn, Margaret has *never once* come here since I have known her."

"What made *you* come?" Margaret asked in surprise.

"Many reasons," Mrs. Crawford replied. "I had seen your mother several times while you were away at school, and I respected her very greatly. A cousin of mine, one of Aunt Monteith's daughters, is buried not far from her. I was very fond of my Cousin Pauline, and I often came to look at her grave, and after your mother died at hers too. I seldom found flowers upon hers, which seemed strange, knowing how many you have, and so it came to be a regular thing for me to bring some."

"Which only shows how shamefully papa neglected it," Margaret exclaimed.

"Not at all," Mrs. Crawford replied. "Such an action as putting flowers upon a grave is much more

natural to a woman than a man; besides, your father is always occupied. I know that he has come here far oftener than his daughter."

Margaret's answer was not audible, but she turned round to accompany Mrs. Crawford, which was in itself something of a victory.

During the walk home she only spoke once, and that was to remark incredulously, "You make out that you are not in the least jealous of mamma."

"I hope and believe I am not," Mrs. Crawford replied earnestly.

This idea was so strange to Margaret that it kept her thoughts occupied all the way. She had judged her by her own way of thinking; and there is no doubt that Mrs. Crawford had read her rightly when she put down her conduct to a desire to mortify the living rather than any real affection for the dead. But if it were true that this new wife had no jealousy, but instead a tender respect for her who was gone, that certainly altered the matter, and ought to have ended Margaret's opposition.

But this was not the case. For this once she was disarmed, and consented to be civil in her demeanour. But very soon the old feeling of rebellion returned in full force, prompted, not as she chose to suppose, from a jealous regard for her mother's memory, but simply by a selfish desire to please herself.

A day or two after this escapade of hers she met Lady Monteith.

"How do you get on together?" she asked abruptly. "Not too well, I can believe."

"We manage somehow," Margaret replied.

"The most mad thing Bessie ever did!" the old lady exclaimed sharply. "She was the last person to be a stepmother."

This remark very well chimed in with Margaret's sentiments, for she was at that moment thinking not too kindly of her stepmother.

"Home is very wretched to me now," she said pathetically. "How I wish you would let me come and live with you, Lady Monteith; I scarcely ever see you now."

Lady Monteith looked at her curiously for a moment. "You live with me!" she said contemptuously. "You want to come to me to get away from the annoyance of a stepmother. I am too selfish to careabout that. I want some one to think of pleasing me, not of pleasing herself. You are the most selfish girl I have ever seen!"

Margaret fired up angrily. "Why should you say that?" she asked.

"Because I know it," Lady Monteith replied. "Was it not for fear of losing your place with me that you called your schoolfellow an impostor, when you had no ground for doing so?"

Margaret looked at her in astonishment; she had long ago forgotten all about Pauline. "It may have been," she replied carelessly, "though I don't see why

you should say I had no ground for doing so. No one knew anything about her; and if her friends were respectable people, why was she so afraid of mentioning them?"

Lady Monteith smiled grimly. "You are very clever, Margaret Crawford," she exclaimed in her own sharp way; "perhaps you are a little too clever."

"Clever or not," sighed Margaret, as she went on her way, pondering on Lady Monteith's change of manner towards her, "I don't suppose there is any one in the world more wretched than I am."

CHAPTER XIX.

A DETERMINED STEP.

MARGARET, after her interview with Lady Monteith, did not look with any more kindliness upon her stepmother—the usurper, as she called her in bitter indignation. "I left school just when I was learning so much, to come home to papa," she said to herself, quite forgetting how anxiously she had begged her father to let her stay with him, and how she had persistently resisted all arrangements for the continuance of her education.

Yet so can eyes be blinded by selfishness that Margaret fully believed she had sacrificed herself to her father, and bitterly reproached him in her heart for his ingratitude in robbing her of the place that she considered was hers by right.

As she dwelt day by day upon her grievances, the sight of the new Mrs. Crawford grew more and more unbearable. Except for Margaret, the house and its affairs began to assume a new appearance, or rather, the old one from which they had fallen away. The little girls came every morning to their new mamma for lessons, and made rapid progress with her, for she taught them so skilfully that they could not feel weary. The servants went about their duties with new heart, seeing that there was some one in the house who could discern between care and neglect; the garden, which had been little heeded by the Doctor of late, began to assume an appearance of order and beauty, the children were once more neatly and tastefully clothed; and, indeed, the new order in the household was displayed in a hundred trifling ways.

All these things were gall and wormwood to Margaret, who chose to think that they were done to shame her. The softer feelings which her stepmother's great kindness had at first called forth were swallowed up by these harsher ones, and she told herself over and over again that she had not a single friend.

Dr. Crawford began to perceive that his wife's kindness was failing of its intention, and that Mar-

garet's manner was openly rude and defiant even in the presence of strangers.

"Gentle measures had been tried long enough," he said, "and they must now see what a firm hand would do with Margaret." Accordingly, on the very next occasion of her behaving rudely her father sternly ordered her out of the room. She had hitherto refused to allow her stepmother to look over her wardrobe, and decide what additions and arrangement it required, but now Mrs. Crawford considered herself bound to act upon her own judgment, without any longer humouring Margaret's fancies. She therefore arranged with great care and thought in what order the various articles should be worn, for Margaret had been both extravagant and careless when left to herself, and was in the habit of wearing something elaborate and costly on one occasion and being quite untidy and shabby upon another. All this her new mother endeavoured to correct, but Margaret resolutely refused to wear the things she wished. This determined opposition began at last to make Mrs. Crawford so unhappy that she listened reluctantly to the Doctor's proposal that Margaret should go away to school.

Margaret received the intelligence with apparent indifference, but when she was alone she burst out furiously. "It was what she wanted all along: to get me out of the house. No wonder she cannot bear to see me here, when she knows she has robbed me of my place; and now she would turn me out altogether,

unless I will consent to be under her thumb like those poor weak-minded children. Indeed I have an enemy! How could I have been so blind, even after poor mamma's warning? She must have suspected what was likely to happen. There is no doubt now who is my enemy, but she shall not have her way with me. If she turns me out of my home, I will do something to make her and papa ashamed of it. If I had only a friend to go to I'd never come back here again, but I haven't a single friend. Even Lady Monteith has turned against me because of this stepmother of mine. Oh, how I dislike her!" and then Margaret gradually fell into a fit of abstraction, wondering how she could shame them all for what she foolishly considered their ill-treatment of her.

That she would leave the home which had become so distasteful to her was her steadfast resolve, but the difficulty was how to accomplish her purpose. To risk being fetched back, or compelled through want and necessity to return of her own will, would be altogether too ignominious, and Margaret was sufficiently sensible to know that she must have a home and food and clothing, and that if she threw away those that belonged to her by right no one was likely to start up and supply her with them. "I wonder whether any one would take me as a governess?" she mused, critically surveying her tall, womanly figure in the glass. "But I should dislike it so," she candidly acknowledged; "it would be nearly as bad as being here. I had rather be

a nursemaid." And then she stopped suddenly, struck with a new idea. "And why shouldn't I?" she asked herself eagerly. "I love tiny children, before they begin to be troublesome and saucy. Just one little boy: that is what I should like. I wonder what Mrs. Crawford would say to it! How ashamed they would be of having driven me to that!"

The more Margaret thought over this idea the more fascinated she became with it. She had so long indulged in selfish and unkind thoughts that those generous impulses from which her own mother had hoped so much seemed quite to have died within her; and now the very assurance that such a step would shame her father and his new wife, who she considered had acted so unfairly towards her, lent it an attraction which quite outweighed any difficulties and hardships that occurred to her.

She entered into this new idea with all the resolution of her strong nature—alas! that so much strength and determination should be directed to a bad purpose instead of to a good one—and had very soon arranged all the details of her flight. She would go straight up to town by the earliest train, and call at the first registry office that she came to. If the whole day passed without her finding what she required, she would pay a visit to Miss Walmer, and request that lady to let her remain with her for a night. In order to carry out her purpose, Margaret decided that she would have to tell something of the real circumstances of her case,

hiding such points as would be likely to lead to discovery.

She carefully selected such garments as she thought most likely to be useful, rejecting most of her laces and ribbons and other gay nick-nacks. She went over her old dresses, and performed such prodigies in the way of mending that Mrs. Crawford, looking into the room during the afternoon, was quite pleased to see Margaret so profitably employed, and looking so unusually content.

When every one else was in bed, and there was no fear of disturbance, Margaret rose softly, and put her things together into two portmanteaus. Then she took out of her dressing-case the sheet of paper on which her mother had traced those dying words of warning, and which she had never read since that first time when they had filled her with so much wonder. Now it was all plain enough, Margaret thought, as she glanced at them with a new interest; yet how wonderful it was that her mother should have seen so plainly what was coming! "No wonder I dislike *her* so," Margaret reflected, feeling that she, and she alone, was the champion of her dead mother's memory. "Poor mamma knew that *she* was our enemy, and it is only natural that I should have the same feeling. There is no doubt now who mamma meant;" and Margaret took a pencil out of her pocket to add the missing words to her mother's unfinished sentence, "Your greatest enemy is"—"your stepmother," Margaret began to write, but she had

only got as far as the "s" of stepmother when she was startled by a footstep outside, and hastily thrust the paper into the open portmanteau lying at her feet, which she pushed under the bed.

"Are you not in bed, Margaret?" her father's voice cried from outside.

"Just going to get in," she replied, turning out the gas and lying down.

She was up again soon after it was light, and rapidly dressed herself, with no wavering in her determination. She put on a waterproof ulster, plain black hat, and an old pair of well-mended gloves, and was, on the whole, very well satisfied with the shabby-neat air she had contrived to give herself.

She managed to get out of the house without attracting attention, and started off briskly on her four-mile walk to the nearest town, where she intended to take the parliamentary train to London.

The carriage in which she rode was filled with working men, who eyed her curiously, and were not too well pleased at her ill-concealed disgust with their rough speech and manners. "All the gells gets mighty fine when they bide in Lunnon a bit," said one man to his neighbour. "There's my gell livin' up there. Why, she's quite the fine lady, and pretty nigh despises the old folk." At which the neighbour laughed and looked at Margaret, who with difficulty restrained her indignation.

But the obnoxious journey came at last to an end,

and Margaret found herself in London. She had come right up to Westbourne Park, as in the old days when she went to school, and here she determined to leave her luggage, and commence her search.

She had not to traverse very many streets before she found what she was looking for—a registry office, into which she turned with a beating heart.

A business-like, middle-aged woman came forward and asked her what she wanted.

"A situation," Margaret replied, with a hot face.

"Mother's help, I suppose," said the woman, opening a book and taking up her pen, without appearing to notice Margaret's confusion. "What name, please, miss?"

"Age?" she continued, writing down Margaret's replies. "Wages? References?"

"I will take whatever any one will give me. I haven't any references," Margaret replied.

"First place," the woman remarked, writing as she spoke, "reference from the minister of your parish or schoolmistress would do. Shall I put that down?"

"No," Margaret replied, getting very red again. "I haven't any reference. I am seeking a situation because I am not comfortable at home."

The woman wrote it all down in her business-like manner, then copied out some addresses, which she gave to Margaret.

"Mrs. Woodward," she said, running through them. "Seven children; two go to school. Four require

teaching about three hours in the morning. Young lady required to do everything for them except menial work. Good needlework wanted. Comfortable home offered in return. You might get that without references, I should think," the woman added.

"I should think I might," retorted Margaret indignantly, but I wouldn't take it. I want to hear of a lady who has one, or at most two children, and I must have enough money to buy clothes. Do people think that they can have their children taken care of for nothing?"

"Comfortable home offered in return," the woman repeated in her business-like tone, which exasperated Margaret beyond measure. However, she found some in the list which seemed more hopeful, so she started off to see for herself what attractions they might offer.

But she came back again very much disheartened. They were for the most part dingy shabby houses, where Margaret imagined no nurse would stay because of the clamour and hard work. Several people would have been glad enough to give her a trial; but Margaret, catching a glimpse of the children, very often with unkempt heads thrust over the banisters to peep at her, felt so inclined to box their ears that she was thankful to get away without committing herself to the temptation. One lady, who looked very rich and very languid, and had two daintily-dressed children seated on stools at her feet, seemed to approve of Margaret until the matter of

references was touched upon, when, finding she had none, she rang the bell, and requested the housemaid to show Margaret out, very much as if she thought the girl must be a thief.

After this rebuff, Margaret was in no heart to seek farther. She turned back to the registry office, quite undecided what step to take next.

"You'd better have a bit of dinner before you go any farther," the woman remarked. "I can let you have a plate of cold meat and bread, or a cup of coffee, if you like."

To this Margaret agreed, for she was tolerably famished by this time. The woman spread her a dingy cloth in a little cupboard-like room opening off the shop, and left her.

While she was engaged over her cold meat and bread a lady came hastily into the shop, and rang the bell communicating with the house.

"Oh, Mrs. Robins," she said, in a quick, yet musical voice, which sounded pleasantly in Margaret's ears, "I am in distress! My nurse has gone home ill; have you any one you can send me just for a time? I want some one at once. What can you do for me?"

"There's a young woman waiting now," Mrs. Robins replied. "She's very young: only about eighteen"—Margaret smiled to herself at the two years added to her age—"but a very superior young person. Will you see her?"

"Indeed I will," the lady answered. "How fortu-

nate! Is she in there?" And before Margaret could hide the traces of her rough meal, or, indeed, do anything, the lady was standing by her side, regarding her with a pair of merry-looking grey eyes, which seemed to display a certain amount of satisfaction with Margaret's general appearance.

"I want some one to come and nurse my little boy for a few weeks. Do you think you would like to come? He's a perfect little darling, and you would be out with him nearly all day. I am sure you're a good walker—you look like it—and that's what I principally want. Hopkins, my maid, can do a great deal, but I can't spare her to take him out."

"I should like it very much, I think," Margaret replied, as soon the excitable little lady gave her a chance of replying.

"And I am sure you would have a most excellent character for trustworthiness, and so on," the lady continued, with a frank, winning smile.

"It's her first going out, ma'am," chimed in Mrs. Robins, with a glance at Margaret.

"Oh, I see," the lady replied. "Then, of course, she hasn't got any character, only a written reference. Oh, well, never mind; no doubt that will do."

"I haven't that," Margaret replied, assuming as well as she could a deferential air, one very foreign to her disposition. "I have left my home because I was very unhappy with my stepmother; but if you will trust me, I don't think you will regret it." Margaret

added these last words very earnestly, for she was beginning to feel considerably cast down about her adventure.

"It is quite a romance," the lady said, looking kindly at Margaret. "And you are too young and too good-looking to be about alone? I wonder whether I shall be doing right to take you into my house? I do a great many foolish things, I am afraid; my husband always tells me so. Now, Mrs. Robins, what do you advise? You are a woman of business. Come, tell me what to do."

"I think her story's true; and I don't believe you'd do any wrong in trying her," Mrs. Robins answered in her measured business-like way. "But for your own satisfaction I should require her to give the name of some friend or relative whom you might write to in confidence."

"Yes, indeed, that's only fair," the lady replied.

A way of getting out of this difficulty suggested itself to Margaret, who looked up at once, and said,

"I was at school in Munster Crescent, Kensington," she replied. "Miss Walmer would tell you that I was there, if you would write to her on that point alone. The fact is, my friends are against the step I have taken, and Miss Walmer would side with them if she knew. So I should have to ask you not to tell her where I was. She might address her letter here, might she not?"

"Yes, that will do," the lady replied. "I will write now at once. It will be simply to ask her if she

will vouch for the general trustworthiness of—what name?—Margaret Crawford, her former pupil."

Margaret hoped Miss Walmer might think her papa had sent her out as a governess-pupil. "At any rate," she said to herself, "it is the only thing to be done."

"You may as well come to me at once," the lady said dubiously. And she added to Mrs. Robins, in a low tome, "It looks a face to be trusted, don't you think? Such a superior girl, too; quite refined in appearance. I really think I may trust her."

CHAPTER XX.

MARGARET'S NEW HOME.

"I AM in fortune's way for once," Margaret said to herself with a sigh of relief, as she prepared to accompany Mrs. Travers, rejoicing that the trying and humiliating ordeal was ended. The remembrance of the terms that had been applied to her—"young person" and "young woman"—the discussion of her character and appearance even—galled her to the quick; but this was ended now, and all was comparatively smooth.

It is difficult to understand how the haughty, intolerant spirit, that would not brook a superior authority

in her own home, could cheerfully submit to accept a position entirely subordinate.

No wonder Mrs. Travers, kind-hearted, and not given to thinking over much, concluded that this poor child must indeed have an unkind stepmother and a miserable home.

"A stepmother always brings division into a house," she said to Margaret sympathetically. "I have remarked it often. The elder children never like it."

It had not occurred to Mrs. Travers, any more than to Margaret, that such matters as these were not for children to decide, but that the head of a household had a perfect right to act as he thought best, without waiting for the permission of his own boys and girls. Yet this was about what such conduct as Margaret's really implied.

Margaret found that her new home was a large, handsomely-appointed house, containing several servants. Her little charge was a beautiful little fair fellow of two years old, the pet and plaything of the household, and in consequence tolerably spoilt. This first afternoon was spent in the endeavour to win the little fellow's confidence, and the novelty was not altogether unpleasing.

But when little Charlie was asleep in his cot, Margaret found that she had either to sit alone in the nursery or join the servants in their hall. She chose the former, and passed a long weary evening, uncheered by book or companion.

A pert young under-housemaid brought her some supper. "You aren't going to sit here every evening, I suppose?" she exclaimed, with a toss of her head. "You'll have to come and fetch what you want yourself, if you do. Did *she* tell you to stay? Because I wouldn't stand it, if I was you. Nicholls came down always."

"But how is it possible that I could know that little Charlie was safe?" Margaret asked evasively, swallowing her indignation as well as she could.

The girl burst into a sneering laugh at Margaret.

"You're not going in for that sort of thing, are you?" she asked contemptuously. "You are a flat if you do more than you're made to! You'll soon get tired of that. You can make yourself very comfortable here if you like. Mrs. Travers is very easy-going; she don't notice much. You can do pretty well as you like if you're a bit sharp."

"If I were your mistress," Margaret said angrily, quite forgetting her true position, and feeling towards the girl as though she were her own servant, "I'd give you a good box on the ears."

The girl was fairly astonished, but presently she broke out, "Hoity-toity! that's it, is it? I'd like to see the mistress who'd dare—or fellow-servant either. But I shan't forget your kind wish, Margaret."

Margaret could scarcely contain her rage. Her fingers itched to turn the girl out of the room, but some one was coming upstairs, and she was obliged to

restrain herself. It proved to be Mrs. Travers, come to give her baby-boy a "good-night" kiss.

Grace, the under-housemaid, went straight to her, and asked, "Please, ma'am, can't Margaret come down to her supper?"

"I don't see why not," Mrs. Travers replied, evidently believing that this was Margaret's wish.

"But is it safe to leave the little fellow?" Margaret asked.

"Nicholls always did," Grace put in spitefully. "Master Charlie never wakes."

"I don't think he does," Mrs. Travers remarked. "I really don't think it would matter to leave him for a short time."

"I have no wish to leave him; I'd far rather remain here," Margaret added significantly, hoping Mrs. Travers would come to her aid, and abash this impertinent young serving-maid of hers.

"Well, really you must arrange it between yourselves," Mrs. Travers replied, putting up her hands deprecatingly, and turning away. "Please yourselves about it. I know no one in my house would neglect the little darling."

This was always Mrs. Travers' way of getting over a difficulty, shirking it easily and gracefully from her own shoulders on to any that came to hand, as Margaret Crawford soon found to her cost.

This Grace was not a pleasant opponent, and Margaret plainly saw that she had made a formidable

enemy of her. It was her duty to wait upon the nursery, but she did not appear the next morning till long after Hopkins, Mrs. Travers' maid, had dressed Charlie, who was growing so impatient for his breakfast that all Margaret's ingenuity was taxed to keep him from an open roar.

At last Margaret, who suspected Grace of wilful neglect, rang the bell pretty sharply. She had to do this a second time before Grace came shuffling carelessly upstairs, tray in hand.

"You'll drop that tray," cried Margaret imperatively. "Why don't you walk properly?"

"Don't you get ringing that bell again, or you'll find you'll get no breakfast at all," Grace remarked, by way of reply.

"I shall ring, and you will reply," said Margaret with decision. "Bring this child his breakfast at once; he's starving."

"Do him good," muttered Grace sulkily, a little overborne by Margaret's authoritative manner, which was far more imperative than that of her mistress.

"Mrs. Travers must be foolish indeed to think you care anything about her or her child," Margaret remarked coldly. "Lay that cloth properly."

"Mrs. Travers is foolish, is she?" said Grace, who was beginning to recover her usual confidence, which Margaret had for a moment upset.

"You'll certainly break some of those things if you

"DOWN IT WENT WITH A CRASH" (p. 197).

knock them about like that," Margaret exclaimed, not heeding Grace's implied threat.

The warning was not unneeded. At that moment Grace, with an angry sweep of her hand, which looked deliberate to Margaret, pushed against the tray, already carelessly enough placed on the extreme edge of the table. Down it went with a crash and a scattering on the floor of a thousand fragments, among which the whole of Margaret's breakfast lay hopelessly ruined.

"I told you so!" cried Margaret angrily, pushing aside the bowl of bread-and-milk from which she had been feeding Charlie, who at the sound of the crash burst out, and not unnaturally, into the most piteous roar.

Grace, after the first shock, placed her hands in her sides, and burst into a fit of uncontrolled laughing, as she stood gazing at the stream of tea and milk rapidly spreading over the floor. Her insensibility to the harm she had done exasperated Margaret, who very naturally felt her sympathy go with the mistress rather than the maid.

"Leave off that senseless noise!" Margaret cried angrily. "What is there to laugh at?"

But Grace only laughed the louder, and between Charlie's screaming and Grace's laughing, neither heard Mrs. Travers calling from her bedroom door for an explanation of the crash. Margaret was, as we know, not much practised in restraining herself. Grace's conduct enraged her beyond measure. She sat little

Charlie down on the floor, and making a sudden dive at Grace, gave her such a blow on her ear as made her stagger.

"Now stop laughing, and pick up this mess," Margaret cried sharply, quite out of temper with the noise and confusion.

What Grace might have done it is not easy to say, for at this moment Mrs. Travers appeared in the doorway, and Grace fell on her knees, and began in a subdued fashion to pick up the fragments.

"Dear, dear! what is all this?" Mrs. Travers asked, looking round in dismay, and catching little Charlie up from the floor, where he was beginning to crawl into the stream from the tea-pot. "Why, Grace, look here—here are some of the best tea-set that you know I value so highly, and my own little favourite china teapot. How came these up here?" Mrs. Travers asked in a vexed tone.

"Margaret kept on ringing so loud, ma'am," Grace replied, so deferentially that Margaret could only stare at her in surprise, "that I was afraid it would annoy you, and I caught up the first things that came to hand."

"Just what you should not do," Mrs. Travers replied. "But you must have been late with the nursery breakfast; it's nearly half-past nine."

"Yes, ma'am," said Grace, with apparent reluctance. "Cook overslept herself, and forgot to wake me; and I was afraid of not having all ready for you and master. I *was* late this morning."

Margaret gazed at the girl in sheer astonishment; it might have been another individual, so altered was her manner and tone. Margaret sat silent and confounded, while Mrs. Travers, who accepted Grace's explanation in perfect good faith, fell to lamenting over the damage.

"I wouldn't have had these cups and plates broken on any account," she said mournfully. "Such beauties as they are too! Oh dear; it is too bad. Now, Grace, you must never let them be used, except for ourselves, again. I am dreadfully grieved."

When she had gone, another rapid change came over Grace's face. "As you held your tongue, I held mine," she said in a more friendly way, as if seeking to establish a confidence. Then she added contemptuously—"Now, did you just hear the way she went on about her bits of china? that's the way with rich folk. What can it matter? there's plenty more where those came from, I dare say. Why, I declare well-to-do people make more fuss than my mother would. They're meanness itself!"

It was not to be expected that these remarks could find any echo in Margaret's mind. "Rich people would soon be poor enough if all the people they had about them were like you," Margaret replied coldly. "And as for your mother, so long as she had cups enough to go round I dare say she was quite content. It's a different matter altogether."

Grace saw very plainly that Margaret was not going

to join with her; she even had a suspicion that the new nursery girl was something uncommon even in the way of lady-helps, of whom Grace knew something.

The answer from Miss Walmer arrived in due course, and was apparently satisfactory, and Margaret, when away from Grace, found herself not so uncomfortably placed as might be supposed. She had to swallow a very unpalatable lump of pride before she could bring herself to place Master Charlie in his little carriage and wheel him into Kensington Gardens; but the drive in the afternoon with Mrs. Travers was less distasteful, for Charlie sat very placidly by his mother's side, and submitted to be caressed.

So the first day of Margaret's strange new life slipped away, and she began to wonder what the people at home were thinking and doing about her, and how she must proceed to prevent them from appearing on the scene and ignominously carrying her off.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TABLES TURNED.

MRS. TRAVERS was indeed kindness itself; her manner and speech were always pleasant and gracious. She talked freely to Margaret when they were out together, sympathised with her misfortunes, praised her appearance, and expressed the kindest hope that she would be really happy in the life she had chosen. But Mrs. Travers' kindness was more the result of a genial, pleasure-loving disposition than of any real thought, and was distributed indiscriminately to those around her.

Margaret found that it was not much protection to her against the annoying impertinences of Grace and her companions, who looked upon Margaret as a disagreeable upstart and dangerous spy, ready to make

the utmost mischief she could between them and their mistress.

Margaret had tried to give Mrs. Travers a hint of Grace's true character, but that lady only put up her hands deprecatingly, and said, "Please don't tell me. So long as things go well, I would rather not know what takes place behind the scenes. I expect it would make me quite unhappy if I knew all that went on downstairs. You must manage them, and get round them. I am sure you are very clever." And so Mrs. Travers' kindness, which was, after all, only an easy-going geniality, did not seem likely to afford Margaret any real help in overcoming the difficulties which beset her path. And if Margaret had reflected a little, she would have understood that the unthinking kindliness which had so readily believed her unproved story and sympathised with her wrongs, without readily knowing the true state of the case, would be extended just as freely to those others who would certainly be ready with a very good account of their own claim to consideration.

As the days passed Margaret began to grow very fond of little Charlie, who was a wonderfully pretty little fellow, and just now at an age when no child can be unattractive. Her life was really a very easy one, and would have been very agreeable, but for the relentless opposition of the servants, and especially Grace, whose power of annoyance was unbounded.

But comfort was out of the question, and Margaret's thoughts of home began to be exercised about

how she might yield to their earnest entreaties for her return without sacrificing her independence and dignity. But the strange thing was that day after day slipped by without bringing any solicitations, or, indeed, any communication at all.

This was more than exasperating. Margaret had taken this step, so distasteful in itself, solely with the idea of humilating those who had behaved so cruelly to her, and filling them with remorse for their unkind treatment.

She had pictured to herself many times how they would be torn and distracted with harrowing fears for her safety: how her father's eyes would be opened to see that he had driven his own child out into the world: and that false, smiling woman, who had robbed her and her mother both, would be filled with compunction, and come humbly to entreat forgiveness for the wrong she had done.

And Margaret had arranged in her own mind how she would turn a deaf ear to their entreaties, and tell them that she preferred to earn her living by any drudgery rather than submit to tyranny and injustice. She had mentally rehearsed this part of her adventure with very great inward satisfaction, and impatiently waited for its fulfilment.

But this pleasure was slow in coming: so slow that Margaret's ideas had time to undergo considerable change. She had succeeded in her scheme more than she dared hope for. Neither servants nor mistress

seemed to suspect her true position, which, though desirable enough in theory, was nevertheless not a little galling in reality. The duties she was expected to perform were such as by the exercise of her strong determination she could easily manage, the only thing expected of her being to amuse little Charlie or take him out.

But here the good fortune at which she had been so elated ended. In every other respect her life was as wretched as it could be. Grace performed her duties in as ill a fashion as she dared, never doing any sweeping or scrubbing for Margaret's domain until she was obliged. Margaret's meals were invariably cold, untidy, and of the worst that the dish or joint afforded. This in itself was enough to make her very wretched, for she had ever been surrounded with neatness and refinement, and more often than not she found it impossible to touch what was sent to her. It was useless to complain to Mrs. Travers, nor could she sufficiently pocket her pride to ingratiate herself with her harassing foes, and thus disarm them.

Two weeks passed, a third, and still no news from home. Margaret had hidden herself almost too effectually. Although she had endeavoured to guard against being sought out and fetched back like a naughty child, it had never entered her head that she would be left to herself altogether. She quite expected that in some way or another she would hear of the commotion her departure had caused.

And now very soon she would be cast adrift again, for Nicholls was stated to be convalescent, and likely to return in a week or ten days. The thought of entering deliberately on a protracted space of such a life was as intolerable as that of giving in, and sueing to her father and stepmother for forgiveness. "They have betrayed now how little they ever cared about me or my welfare," she thought bitterly, as she laid her aching head upon the pillow at night, feeling indeed forsaken and wretched. "I dare say my precious stepmother is only too glad to be relieved of my presence, in spite of all her pretended kindness. It was clever indeed to rob me with one hand and stroke me down with the other: rob me of everything—friends, home, freedom, everything that makes life pleasant. Why, I wonder, should I be so persecuted?"

It gradually dawned upon Margaret's mind that her mad escapade must have failed in its object. If her father and stepmother cared so little about her that they did not even think it worth while to ascertain where she was and what she was doing, she might spend her life in the most painful drudgery without causing them any shame and remorse. Under these conditions such an occupation had no attractions; on the contrary, all the shame and humiliation—if any there were—fell upon herself, while they were left free to rejoice in her absence.

Bitter reflections these for proud, selfish Margaret. At last she felt she could no longer bear to be so com-

pletely forgotten and ignored; she must let them know that she was not so easily to be got rid of. It was cruel and heartless that she, at her young age, should be made to suffer so much, while others were enjoying their lives, quite regardless of her. They must be made to feel, she said to herself, full of burning indignation; and so she sat down and wrote the following letter:—

"DEAR PAPA,—I am astonished to find that my escape from home, where I was too uncomfortable to stay, has been taken so little notice of, for I have worried myself—needlessly, it seems—by thinking you might be distressed and anxious for my safety. I feel sure, though, that if you alone were concerned you could never have left me so long to myself, but I know well enough who it is that influences you against me. In case, however, you may feel any anxiety, I should like you to know that I am safe and well, getting an honest living by taking charge of a little child. I believe I am called a 'lady help,' or something like that, by the lady who has given me a home, but the servants here, at any rate, call me a nursemaid. But I only stay here a few days longer, until I can find another suitable home.

"Your unhappy daughter,

"MARGARET."

"I think that will do," Margaret said to herself, reading it through critically. "There is a very good opportunity for papa to beg me to come back, as I say I shall be leaving here so soon, and if he has half an eye he will see that I am sick enough of this life. Yet I do not ask for anything; the letter is independent enough. Yes, I think I have managed that very well."

Margaret dispatched her letter, and waited with the utmost impatience for a reply. She had, after some

hesitation, given Mrs. Travers' address, for she felt sure that her father was far too quiet and reserved a man to make any disturbance, even if he decided to come and fetch her peremptorily away; and, on the whole, she felt that she would be really delighted to have her true position established beyond a doubt.

The reply came the next day. Margaret tore it open with trembling fingers and a beating heart, but with no real doubt as to the nature of its contents. What was her dismay and indignation when she read it! At first she could not believe she had understood aright; but when she had carefully gone through it again, and there was no further room for doubt, she flung it from her, and stamped and fumed about the room in her indignant anger, and at last, overcome with a passion of disappointment, the more overwhelming that it had been so entirely unexpected, she burst into a rage of tears, quite regardless of the astonished and lugubrious face of Master Charlie, until a loud wail from that small person recalled her to herself.

The letter which had so upset her ran thus:—

"DEAR MARGARET,—You are very mistaken in supposing that we were unacquainted with your present whereabouts. Your mother ascertained exactly what you had done, and where you had gone, the same day that you left here. I am glad to know you have been so far fortunate, for you do not seem to have been aware to what dangers you exposed yourself when you took so extraordinary a step, and from which you have been most mercifully preserved. I hope you will continue to do well in the life you have chosen, which, though not by any means what I should have thought of for you, may after all be the very train-

ing you require. A definite purpose is what you very much needed, and I am glad to find you capable of really hard, self-denying work. May God guard and protect you.

"Your affectionate father,

"E. CRAWFORD."

"THE REPLY CAME" (p. 207).

So Margaret had unwittingly decided her own fate. There was no chance of her returning home, except under circumstances too humiliating to be thought of patiently. She had made her bed, and must lie upon it. This, indeed, was the sum and substance of her father's letter, which, strangely enough, betrayed no sense of annoyance or humiliation, but rather

approval of a kind of work she would never have dreamed of, except with the idea of disgracing the woman she regarded as her enemy. It could not have been foreseen that neither she nor Dr. Crawford would consider it a disgrace, and Margaret had nothing left now but to set to work to find as comfortable a home as she could, with the unenviable knowledge that she had neither disgraced nor humiliated anybody but herself. Still she could not and would not believe that they would suffer her to continue in such a life altogether. Sooner or later they would certainly come round if she persistently held out.

CHAPTER XXII.

PAULINE MEETS LADY MONTEITH.

PAULINE HAMILTON had been at a high school in a seaside town now for a year and a half. Miss Walmer had taken the greatest interest in Lady Monteith's plan, and had spared no trouble or pains to choose a suitable locality and a really good school, giving also much valuable time and thought to the less important matter of Pauline's wardrobe. Miss Walmer, solitary and self-dependent, hardened and roughened a little by her fight with the world, proved by this act of unselfish kindness how much generosity and real sympathy there was in her in spite of that contact; and Pauline knew that she had given her more than money.

"I am afraid I have seemed harsh," she said at

parting, "but no one rejoices more at your good fortune than I do; and after all, my apparent unkindness has been the means of bringing it to you."

"You have been far kinder to me than I ever could have expected or deserved," Pauline said honestly. "I shall always be grateful for your goodness." And Pauline was grateful, but even she hardly guessed how much goodness there was in this plain-featured, undemonstrative woman.

Here Miss Walmer passes away from our story, as in life little noted, exciting small interest in her concerns. There are many such, living self-denying lives, prevented by the very conditions of their existence from performing any great noticeable acts of benevolence or charity, yet doing their small deeds of kindness at infinitely greater cost than that which builds churches and endows hospitals. Of one such as these our Saviour gave as His highest commendation, "She hath done what she could."

Pauline's life was a very altered one from this time. Miss Walmer, who only wore old-fashioned garments herself, proved that she knew as much about such matters as any one else, for she selected Pauline's dresses with the utmost taste, and it was quite surprising to note the improvement this judicious care made in her appearance. Her slight, supple figure was pronounced by the dressmaker to be "quite the highest fashion," at which Pauline was very greatly amused, and asked if there were such a thing as fashion in figures.

and faces. "Certainly there was," the modiste replied, and Miss Hamilton's was excellent; but if she might suggest, Miss Hamilton's style of dressing her hair was rather out of date.

Pauline, who was only anxious to appear like other young English ladies, took the modiste's hint, which was also seconded by Miss Walmer. It was not without some tender, regretful memories that Pauline put up the long fair curls her mother had been wont to stroke so lovingly; but Miss Walmer insisted that curls were quite a fashion of the past, and braids alone were worn, and were, indeed, highly becoming to her young friend. Pauline's anxiety to look like other people was by no means the result of vanity, but prompted by a desire to make her appearance such as would please Lady Monteith when she should see her; although I cannot deny that she was sufficiently interested in her own appearance to feel a delightful glow of satisfaction when Miss Walmer declared enthusiastically that the change was in every way an improvement, and that Pauline's fair wavy hair never looked so well as when confined in that little sunny knot at the back of her head.

So Pauline bade good-bye to the close London square, and sped away from the great airless city to the fresh, invigorating sea breezes. It seemed like a new breath of life, blowing away the languor and depression of these last weary months, and sending the blood tingling through her veins with a new sensation of vigour and strength.

No student in the school entered more thoroughly and earnestly into the course of work. Perhaps no girl there had so much depending on the result of her work. The standard here was a very high one, and Pauline had all she could do to keep up with the other girls, who were well acquainted with the course. But it was a very different matter from Miss Walmer's, where her time was continually cut into by her care of young pupils, and study rendered wearisome by ill-health.

At the end of the first six months Pauline wrote to Lady Monteith, in accordance with the desire expressed in her letter. She gave that lady a glowing account of the life she was leading, with a description of the work and system of the school. Her very evident appreciation of the advantages she was enjoying probably pleased Lady Monteith more than any elaborately-worded thanks, for she returned to Pauline a brief, but far more gracious letter than she was in the habit of writing.

In due course Pauline's year at school drew to a close, and she waited with considerable anxiety for another letter from Lady Monteith, without which she dared not venture upon paying the visit to Monteith House, which had been spoken of. The breaking-up day arrived without a sign or word.

Pauline had carried off a large proportion of the prizes, and been openly commended for her great industry and intelligent progress. In the midst of the excitement of this great day a visitor for Pauline was

announced. Wondering very much, and without the least suspecting who it might be, she caught up her pile of prizes under her arm, and all flushed and excited with her unthought-of success, ran eagerly into the visitors' room, full of her good news.

A handsome old lady, clad in rich, dull black silk, was seated on a couch, listening with some discernible impatience to the apologies of a junior governess for the unavoidable absence of the lady principal, still engaged with the distinguished personages who had come to witness the prize-giving. The lady had apparently declined to join this select company, for when Pauline entered she was exclaiming rather abruptly, "Thank you. No; I only wish to see Miss Hamilton."

She turned round at Pauline's entrance, and her eyes rested on the young girl with pleased surprise. Pauline, with her companions, had donned gala attire for the great occasion, and one of the girls had fastened at her neck a little group of ox-eye daisies. Her face, usually rather pale, was flushed, and her eyes sparkling with pleasurable excitement: a very different-looking girl altogether from the languid, spiritless-looking, shabby little Pauline whom Margaret had described so graphically.

"Lady Monteith!" Pauline said, putting down her books, and going forward with sudden misgiving.

She had thought so long and anxiously about this meeting, what she must say and do when it arrived so as not to offend the susceptibilities of this proud, in-

"SHE TURNED ROUND AT PAULINE'S ENTRANCE" (p. 214).

tolerant woman. But she might have spared herself all her trembling and anxious preparation for the dreaded interview, for here she was taken quite by surprise, without a moment given her to call to mind the words and behaviour she had so carefully thought over.

The hand that she extended to Lady Monteith trembled perceptibly. Lady Monteith may have noticed it, for she grasped it firmly in her own, and drew Pauline with an imperious movement on to the couch by her side. The junior governess, with considerable tact, excused herself and withdrew.

"I hear you have done well," Lady Monteith said. "Were those prizes you brought in with you?"

"Yes; will you care to see them?" Pauline said, glad and happy to be able to place before the eyes of her benefactress this proof of her having worked well.

Lady Monteith glanced over the inscriptions.

"You did not expect to see me here," she said presently, letting the pages drop carelessly through her fingers.

"It is such a long way for you to come," Pauline said apologetically, wondering from the old lady's tone whether it was a point of offence that she should not have expected her.

"I wished to hear Mrs. Morant's own unvarnished account of you," Lady Monteith said abruptly; "and I also wished to see you before I asked you to come to Monteith House."

To this Pauline could make no reply. Lady Monteith may, perhaps, have seen that it was an uncomfortable remark, for she added hastily, after a moment's pause—

"You are very different from what I had pictured you. You are like your mother. Margaret Crawford drew your portrait for me. It included the words 'uncivilised' and 'dowdy,' I remember."

"I have never heard from Margaret since she left Munster Square," Pauline remarked abstractedly. "I have often wondered how she got over her mother's death."

"Don't trouble yourself about Margaret; she has no good-will towards you," Lady Monteith replied, critically regarding Pauline's face, as if to read whether this quiet ignoring of such an unflattering remark were the result of great art or perfect simplicity.

"How soon can you be ready to leave here? To-night, do you suppose?"

"I have no doubt I could if you wished it. There is a great deal of packing going on to-day, and I had not made any arrangements, as I had no idea when or where I was going," Pauline replied.

"I do wish it," Lady Monteith said in her imperious way. "I have taken apartments on the Parade for myself and you, and if I like the arrangement and the place, I think of staying here during your holidays, which I intend you to spend with me. Tell me honestly, if you can, what you think of that plan?"

"I think it is too good of you," Pauline replied.

"Will it give you pleasure?" Lady Monteith asked, fixing her clear, piercing eyes on Pauline's face.

"I hope—I think so," Pauline replied, wishing that she might be spared such awkward questions. "It is what I have wished and longed for."

"But," added Lady Monteith sharply, "you are afraid of me."

"I am afraid of not pleasing you," Pauline admitted, with a little quiver in her voice. "After you have done so much for me, too."

Again Lady Monteith darted a swift critical glance at Pauline. Was it art or simplicity? Something in Pauline's downcast young face, perhaps a latent energy of purpose, which she could well sympathise with, attracted the old lady. "Child," she said hastily, and with some emotion, "if you really think I have done much for you, you may very soon make me ample, and more than ample, return. My old age is very lonely, bitterly lonely."

It was but a momentary impulse, repented of the next moment. Nothing but long years of weary heart-ache could have betrayed the proud, self-dependent old lady into such a mistake—inviting this girl, as she reflected almost immediately afterwards, to ingratiate herself, as so many others had done, for the most interested motives.

Perhaps Pauline's quick tact helped her to under-

stand why Lady Monteith's manner was suddenly more distant than it had been before. Mrs. Morant made an opportune appearance very shortly after this, and it was at once arranged for Pauline to accompany Lady Monteith without any delay, taking with her such articles as were indispensable, the rest of her belongings to be forwarded next day. Mrs. Morant gave a glowing account of her pupil, representing to Lady Monteith how very glad she should have been to have her for another year, which she said was the general opinion of the masters and governesses. It was ten thousand pities for Pauline to break off now, when she was advancing so rapidly.

Pauline was soon ready, and found herself presently in the novel and unexpected position of being seated at luncheon at Lady Monteith's table.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNJUST SUSPICIONS.

PAULINE'S first days with Lady Monteith were full of keenest disappointment. The old lady was in one of her coldest and most imperious moods, and so haughty and distant in manner that Pauline could make no way with her. The fact was that she was so annoyed with herself for having betrayed that weak spot in her armour of reserve that she had assumed a more than ordinarily proud demeanour, in order to banish its memory from Pauline's mind. Her great object in coming here had been to watch narrowly and judge of Pauline, quite

apart from any possible influence of friends and neighbours, with the full determination that if she saw in her what she half expected to find—simply a mercenary interest in her rich connection—she would take care that their acquaintance went no farther. Already she had, quite contrary to her purpose, raised expectations in the girl's mind of a friendliness that did not exist. At present her feelings were, she assured herself, perfectly neutral.

Lady Monteith was hardly prepared to find so well-informed and gentle-mannered a girl as Pauline proved to be. She had pictured a wild, loud-voiced, large-limbed young Amazon, and was continually being surprised that a child born and reared in that outlandish colony could have pleasant, quiet manners. It was just as well that Pauline did not know how often the old lady's furtive glance rested wistfully on her bright young face and figure.

They had been together nearly a week, and were seated one morning on a distant stretch of beach. Pauline had been reading to Lady Monteith. Suddenly the old lady said abruptly, "That will do; I want to talk to you about something very important."

Pauline shut up the book. "I suppose you believe that I am very rich, Pauline," she said, rather irritably.

"I have always thought of you as having a beautiful house and carriages and costly dresses," Pauline replied; "and I suppose that is the same thing."

"Not quite," Lady Monteith said sarcastically.

"You, no doubt, suppose I shall leave a large sum of money behind me."

"I have never thought about it," Pauline returned quickly. "I have not been in the habit of thinking about money. It was not much use to us at home, where we could not have bought things if we had possessed it."

"I do not suppose you would tell me your real thoughts on such a subject," Lady Monteith said coldly; "but lest you may be forming any expectations, I may as well tell you at once that I am not the rich woman your mother has taught you to believe me. Much of my money has vanished, and I am comparatively poor."

"You wrong mamma," Pauline replied, flushing up indignantly. "She taught us all to think of you with the greatest reverence, but of course we believed you were rich from the description she gave us of Monteith House, and many other things mamma told us. But I never dreamed you were poor when I wrote and asked you to help me," she added apologetically, "and you have spent so much on me."

"I am not so poor as all that," Lady Monteith replied, smiling to herself at Pauline's notions of rich and poor. "I said comparatively poor." How could Pauline know that she was making the very utmost out of a trifling loss of some fifty pounds a year from an income counted by thousands?

"It was very good of you to do all you have for me,

in addition to your losses," Pauline added earnestly; "and it does not seem in my power to make any return."

"Suppose I had to tell you that so much of my income was lost that I must leave Monteith House, and had come here to think over the best and least humiliating plan of retrenching?"

"Give up Monteith House, where you have lived so long!" Pauline said with quick sympathy. "Oh? I should think that would be a great grief to you."

"You are sorry for me?" Lady Monteith asked, watching the expression of Pauline's interested face. "Yes; I think it would almost kill me to leave the old place, where every tree and shrub is a friend. It will be very lonely."

Pauline glanced up at the old lady's troubled face, and made as though she would speak, but the words died on her lips.

"What were you going to say?" Lady Monteith asked.

"Might I—would you let me—I should be so very glad if I could come with you"—and then Pauline, having got over the worst difficulty, waxed eloquent—"if I could save you from being so lonely; and I might do many things for you. I always did for mamma. I have been accustomed to be useful. You have no idea how many things I can do. Would you not let me come and be with you—until you got used to your new home, at any rate?"

"And after that?" Lady Monteith asked. "Do you think it wise to make a limit in case you find it too dull a life?"

"Not that at all," Pauline replied, a little hurt and indignant; "but I have two younger sisters, and I hope to get them over here, and by teaching myself to pay for a portion of their education. This was the principal reason that I was so anxious to get on myself, and so loath to give up when Miss Walmer could not keep me any longer. It has been for years my great idea, and the one thing that gave me courage to write to you when I did."

"Then, how long can you spare for me?" Lady Monteith asked.

"Jessie is not so old as I am," Pauline replied; "she is three years younger than I was when I came to England. A year, at any rate, would not make much difference to her."

"And you are willing to spend that year with me, in my new home?"

"May I? Oh! I should be so glad, and so would mamma."

"And what about your father?" Lady Monteith asked searchingly.

"Papa? He would be glad, I am sure. He is so sorry about mamma. He often reproaches himself so for taking her away from England and from you that he would do anything to please her. And it has always been mamma's great wish that we should know you."

"And they are happy together?" Lady Monteith asked meditatively.

"Who?—papa and mamma? Oh, yes!" Pauline replied, wondering at such an uncalled-for question. "Mamma only grieves about you. They have often talked of coming to England, but papa says mamma would be much more unhappy to be in the same country, and not able to go to you. I believe that alone keeps him in Australia. He is always anxious about mamma's happiness."

"What did they expect from me if they came over!" Lady Monteith asked with a suspicious tone.

"Nothing!" Pauline replied hotly. "You do papa great wrong. I think Lady Monteith is the last person in the world he would accept anything from. I have never told him of what you have done for me, because I feared he would disapprove. Mamma knew, and consented to keep my secret: not willingly, but because my heart was set upon it, and, and she could not bear to disappoint me."

"You are tolerably plain-spoken!" Lady Monteith exclaimed, not without approval. "And so you expect nothing, and your father and mother expect nothing from me? You are willing to come and stay with me on that distinct understanding?"

"It would not be true to say I expect nothing," Pauline replied dubiously, seeing that Lady Monteith was waiting for a reply.

"Ah, we are coming to it at last," the old lady

remarked sharply. "You seem to be truthful. Now tell me what you expect."

"I have hoped always," Pauline replied timidly, but with much earnestness, "that if ever I got to know you, and could have an opportunity of telling you how good mamma is, you would write to her, and be friendly with her again."

"And this, then, is your highest expectation?" Lady Monteith asked.

"It was my great object in coming to England," Pauline said, simply. "I have had it in my mind ever since I was a tiny child, and wondered why mamma cried when she looked at your and grandpapa's portraits. She told me that grandpapa had been very angry with her, and died without forgiving her, and that you were still angry. I used to wish then that I could go and ask you not to be angry any longer, because poor mamma was so unhappy. When I grew older, I made up my mind that I would, and for this reason I begged papa and mamma to let me come over here to school. It was always mamma's great wish too."

Lady Monteith moved restlessly. Did this child guess at the long years of lonely sorrow, of yearning for a reconciliation she was too proud to offer, yet could not look for from Pauline's mother, after the cruelly-worded refusal twice repeated?"

"Your mother was mistaken," she said presently, in an unusually gentle voice. "Your grandpapa did forgive her. It was I who could not."

"But will you not now?" Pauline asked eagerly.

"If she gives me her child, you think I must make her some return," Lady Monteith replied, with a little laugh. "And so it is agreed that you and I are to live for a year in poverty and seclusion together," she added banteringly. "Dear me! we have gossiped away the morning, and it is time for luncheon. Just give me the help of your strong young arm, my dear."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

THERE was a distinct difference in Lady Monteith's manner to Pauline after that conversation recorded in our last chapter. The old lady seemed suddenly to develop a great liking for her young companion. It was wonderful to see how much she began to depend upon the sympathy and careful attention of her grandchild, and how her proud inflexible face brightened and softened at the sound of Pauline's girlish voice. The term of close relationship which Pauline had unconsciously slipped into when so earnestly pleading her mother's cause, and which she had never before ven-

tured to use, was constantly on her lips now, and seemed to fall pleasantly on the old lady's ears. In spite of her talked-of losses, she bought Pauline many costly presents of articles such as she considered a young girl ought to have; and though there were times when the naturally haughty manner caused Pauline's gentler spirit much unhappiness, on the whole they got on wonderfully well together.

Lady Monteith probed and tried Pauline in a hundred ingenious ways to satisfy her mind that her grandchild was really as innocent of design upon her money as she appeared to be, for she, like many another rich person, tormented herself with the belief that the affection and interest of people generally were for her money, and not for herself.

The holidays flew by, on the whole, pleasantly enough. Pauline's quick, sympathetic nature divined the loneliness and perhaps self-reproach, hidden beneath the reserved, proud front Lady Monteith displayed to the world, and she used her utmost endeavours to cheer and amuse her. It was not to be wondered at that the old lady looked forward with a sense of sorrow to their parting.

She had taken the greatest pains to ascertain how far Pauline's education had extended, and though perfectly satisfied that the best possible use had been made of the time, she came to the conclusion that Miss Morant was right, and that the next year would be even more advantageous than the past one.

"I have arranged, my dear," she said one morning at breakfast, "that you should return to Mrs. Morant for the present."

Pauline looked up in surprise from the tea she was making. "But grandmamma, I thought I was to come and be useful to you in your new house?"

"I shall not give up Monteith House just yet," the old lady replied, with a quiet smile; "and I think it very necessary for you to continue your studies just now."

"I could do a great deal by myself," Pauline said, anxiously. "After your losses, you know, grandmamma, it would be such a dreadful expense for you."

"You may leave that to me," Lady Monteith replied. "I shall not undertake anything I am unable to perform."

After that, of course, Pauline could say no more, and she was indeed delighted to return to school; but the thought that this expense was really a matter of consequence to her grandmother robbed her of much of the pleasure she would otherwise have felt in her studies. She was to write to Lady Monteith as often as she liked, and her letters were always answered; but still there was no mention of the removal to smaller and less pleasant quarters.

With the Christmas holidays Lady Monteith once more appeared at Brighthurst, spending them there

with Pauline, and again sending her back to Mrs. Morant's for another six months.

So far, Pauline had scarcely ventured to make any further allusion to the subject that was ever in her thoughts. Once she had remarked that she was about to write to her mother, and asked whether she might send any message, but Lady Monteith showed so plainly that this matter was one she did not care to speak of, that Pauline had not dared to allude to it again.

Grateful as she was to her grandmother for the great and unlooked-for help she had extended to her, she felt that she would have indeed miserably failed in the great object of her life if the goodwill of Lady Monteith towards her family were to begin and end with herself. She knew very well that her mother had long ago given up all hope of winning Lady Monteith's forgiveness for the great offence of marrying a poor man, and that the most she hoped for was that the old lady should be reconciled to her grandchildren. But to Pauline, who loved her own mother so dearly, this seemed but of the smallest importance, compared with the other. She felt quite sure if Lady Monteith, old and lonely as she now was, could but see her mother, so gentle and patient and forgiving, she would wonder how she could have treated her so unkindly all these years.

She began to feel very low-spirited and discouraged about this, and also about another matter. She had received no answer to her last two letters home, although

they were most important, and concerned the arrangements for her sister's education in England. Never before had her letters remained unanswered, and Pauline began to fear that some misfortune had befallen her family, from whom she had been so long parted.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR MEETING.

THE fortune on which Margaret had prided herself in gaining so quickly such a home as Mrs. Travers' seemed quite to have deserted her now. It was in vain she went to house after house of which Mrs. Robins gave her the addresses, and underwent the most humiliating examinations. No one seemed inclined to follow good-natured, easy-going Mrs. Travers' example, and take in the young, inexperienced girl, whose manner was rather defiant than respectful.

Margaret began now to think regretfully of home, and even to acknowledge to herself that she had at least

jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire; and, as distance softens every view, so her memories of the comfortable, cared-for life she had wilfully relinquished assumed an aspect differing very widely from the light in which she had been wont to regard it.

It became a matter of necessity for her to find a new situation without delay. Several times she even wondered if she could find any pretext for returning home, but her health being so far perfect, and no one, not even her father, having expressed any desire for her return, there was not the shadow of an excuse. If she went, it must be in all humility, as an erring and repentant child, and Margaret could not yet be said to be either humble or really penitent.

There was nothing left for her, then, but to accept the least disagreeable opening that presented itself. This happened to be in the family of a wealthy ironmonger, whose wife was agreeably impressed by Margaret's superior appearance.

It was a very different house from Mrs. Travers'. There were a great many children, and a very great deal of work for every one to do. Mrs. Willett herself worked hard and kept her assistants well up to the mark. From the moment Margaret was awoke in the morning by two dreadfully wide-eyed, restless children who shared her room, till the late hour at night when she was at last free to rest, she never had a quiet moment to herself.

Her fondness for children had never been of a very

engrossing or self-denying nature. A pretty, engaging child like little Charlie Travers, always dressed most charmingly, had a great attraction for her, probably through the artistic element which was rather largely developed in her nature. But a set of children, some of whom were old enough to be rude and clamorous and defiant, and who, by reason of their numbers, were very seldom all spick and span, or all good together at one time, was almost too severe a strain upon Margaret's benevolence, especially as she, by virtue of her "superiority," had a far greater share of them than the much older woman who acted as nurse. Margaret it was who must teach them their letters—most distasteful of all tasks, she inwardly declared—must hear the elder ones practise, must see that the little girls did their work properly, and that their clothes were always in order. This continual contact with children is trying even for those who have the widest love and the most enduring patience. Perhaps no greater proof can be given of the strength of will that Margaret could bring to bear upon any undertaking to which she gave her mind than the fact that she did manage to get through, in some fashion, these arduous and novel duties. Week after week slipped by, and no further communication from home reached her. Could it be their intention to leave her entirely to the fate she had chosen? She must have patience, and wait a little longer.

Her patience was indeed sorely tested, for she had some time since come to the conclusion that this life

was unbearable, and yet she was compelled to go on bearing it. The continual round of never-ending duties prevented her from coming much in contact with the servants, but what little she saw of them did not tend to make her life happier. Mrs. Willett was not much liked, and there were a great many things said about her that Margaret openly resented; for, with all her faults of temper and disposition, she had too much of the spirit of good breeding about her to patiently hear a mistress abused behind her back in her own house. The delinquents quickly perceived that she would not be one of them, and they were not going to allow that she was in any way better than themselves, so that there was speedily open warfare between them, and Margaret, as before, came off worst.

She often got into trouble, too, with Mrs. Willett, a lady who never scrupled to say out everything that displeased her, but seldom found time or opportunity for a word of encouragement. Margaret did not like being found fault with, especially when she was aware that she was working harder than she had ever done in her life before.

"Miss Crawford," Mrs. Willett said one day, "you must not let your spirits flag. It is necessary for any one in your position to keep all her energies up to the mark. I am afraid you give way to depression."

Margaret thought it was not wonderful under the circumstances if she did, but she was wise enough to reply that she supposed the hot weather was trying to her.

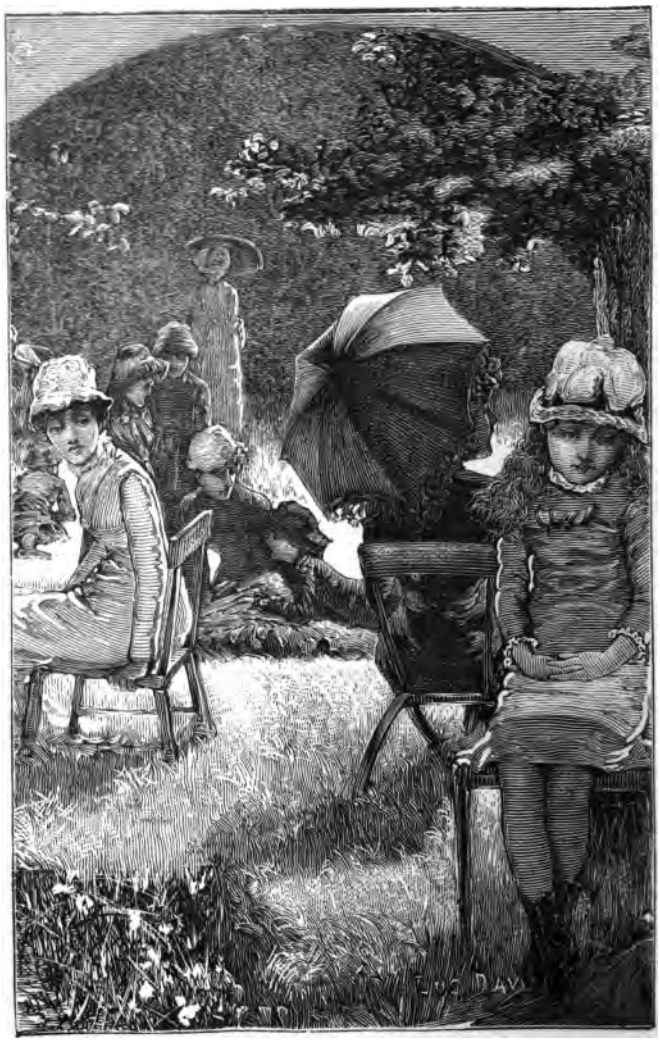
"You will be glad, no doubt, to get away into the country," Mrs. Willett returned. "We shall be leaving town very shortly. We never go to the seaside with our large family. This year we have taken farmhouse apartments near Chisholm."

"Chisholm?" Margaret said, looking up quickly. But Mrs. Willett's face was quite unconscious. She evidently did not know that Chisholm was very little distant from Margaret's home, and had no design in her remark. "I know Chisholm," Margaret replied, trying to preserve an appearance of unconcern. "It is not much of a place. I don't think you would care about it."

"I am sorry you do not like it," Mrs. Willett said coldly, "for we shall certainly go there."

After all, it did not so much matter, Margaret reflected. Although it was barely three miles from East Mere, it was so out of the way that she was hardly likely to meet any one she knew there. And even if she did, they would probably be ignorant of her affairs, and might not think it anything very strange to see her in company with a pack of children and their nurse. They would probably imagine she was staying with a friend, and had been good-natured enough to accompany the children in their walk.

The question which exercised her mind was whether the townsfolk and people about did know what she had done and was still doing; but she felt tolerable sure that, for their own sakes, her father and Mrs. Crawford would keep it a profound secret.



"SHE WATCHED IMPATIENTLY" (p. 241).

She had taken the elder children one day to walk in Kensington Gardens, which she liked, because she could sit down at her ease, and let the children run about where they would. It was not often she could indulge this fancy, for the walk was a long one, and the nurse, who had a baby to carry, rather objected. To-day, however, the baby was poorly, and Margaret had the children to herself.

While she was resting on one of the seats, her attention was arrested by the back and a small portion of the side face of a young girl seated at a little distance from her, in such a way that the greater part of her features were hidden. The figure seemed perfectly familiar, and yet Margaret could not remember where she had seen it.

She watched impatiently for its owner to turn round so that she might satisfy her curiosity. It was no one she knew very well, she felt sure, or she would have taken every pains to avoid a meeting—probably it was a face she had seen and noticed somewhere. The fascination of settling the irritating question of identity laid powerful hold of her: so much so, that at last she rose and took a little stroll on the grass, that she might come in full view of the face.

She had not bargained for what happened.

The stranger caught sight of her, and recognised her. She jumped up, and came running to meet her with her hand stretched out, exclaiming, "Why, Margaret, who'd have thought of seeing you?"

There was no mistaking the open, sunny face, with its setting of fair, brown, wavy hair, though the transition from a child to a growing up girl had altered Janie Denton more than it does most girls.

Margaret took the hand that was held out not very cordially. "Most people come to London sometimes," she replied evasively.

"Just the old Margaret, proud and disdainful," thought Janie, with the sense of having received a cold shower-bath. It seemed to her so impossible that they should feel anything but pleased at meeting again after so long a time.

"Are you staying here?" Margaret asked.

"We have come to live in London for the present," Janie replied sadly—she was altogether very sober and considerably womanised. "Mamma has been very ill the last year or so, and we have come here to be near her physician. She is quite an invalid now." Poor little Janie told Margaret this, the great circumstance of her life, with such a downcast face and pitiful voice, that had Margaret been less occupied with her own affairs she might easily have read the little domestic tragedy that was entering into Janie's life—none the less overwhelming to her tender heart that it had happened, and is happening, and will continue to happen so frequently. She had already learnt that this coming up to London was, so to speak, her mother's death-warrant—a sort of satisfying everybody that nothing had been left undone. Janie, an only child, had been as the

apple of an eye to her parents, and she and her mother more like companions than many sisters. Was it any wonder that this cloud seemed to overshadow and envelop her, making her sad and thoughtful beyond her years?

But Margaret, occupied with her own thoughts, read nothing of all this. "Where are you living?" she asked in an unheeding way, that greatly wounded Janie's susceptibilities.

"In Powis Square," Janie replied. "We have been here about a fortnight."

"Powis Square!" Margaret echoed. It was quite close to Mrs. Willett's. They would be very likely to meet each other frequently. Margaret was facing this disagreeable probability. Janie wondered how, after having lost her own mother, she could be so indifferent to her trouble.

But Margaret's thoughts were in quite another direction. Presently, to break an uncomfortable pause, she asked, "What became of your great friend, Pauline Hamilton? Did you ever hear?"

"Oh yes!" Janie replied excitedly. "Such strange things have happened to her. Haven't you heard? How strange!"

"I have heard nothing," Margaret replied. "But I quite expected strange things would turn up about that girl."

"But they are such good things," Janie continued enthusiastically. "I don't think you believed that anything good would come to her."

"Never mind telling me what you thought I thought," Margaret said, with a flash of her old impatience. "Tell me the news."

"I wonder whether you will be glad," Janie said dubiously. "After all, it is nothing so very wonderful, only it seems so to us because we never knew anything about her friends. You know, her father and mother were in Australia; but her mother had left England soon after she was married, because Pauline's grandmamma was very angry about her daughter marrying some one who was not rich. Pauline's grandmamma was very wealthy, and her daughter, who was Pauline's mamma, you know, ought to have had a good sum of money too at her father's death, but her parents were offended with her, and so she did not have it, or she would have come to England. Do you understand all that?"

"Yes; it is easy enough to understand, if it is true," Margaret replied. "Who was it that told you all this?"

"Pauline herself. She and I have always written to each other. I shall never forget Pauline. She was so different from all the other girls. Do you remember how ill she used to be at Miss Walmer's?"

"She had bad throats," Margaret replied.

"Oh! she used to be miserably ill," Janie added reproachfully. "I saw it quite plainly, and it turned out I was right, for in the end the doctor said she must leave London and go into the country. Pauline did not

know what to do, for it seems she had a great idea that when she had finished her education she would go and see her grandmamma, and try to persuade her to be friendly with her father and mother. Her mother was very unhappy about it, you know; but she did not want her grandmamma to see her until she had got a little more knowledge of English ways and was better educated, for she had lived where there was no school or masters to be had, and her grandmamma was very proud and difficult to please. Well, when she was obliged to leave Miss Walmer, she was in great distress, because she was afraid she would have to give up her plan and go home; but as a last resource she wrote to her grandmamma, and the old lady seemed to take a fancy to her, though I don't see how she could help it. Any way, she sent her to a splendid school for two years, and she's been learning all sorts of things, and these holidays she's going to leave, and is to spend them with her grandmamma. But the best of all is that she thinks Lady Monteith is ready to forgive and forget the quarrel with Mrs. Hamilton."

Margaret stood staring blankly at Janie. "Lady Monteith!" she gasped.

"Yes; Lady Monteith is her grandmamma, so you see there was no need for any of the girls to have snubbed her. You know Lady Monteith, don't you?"

"Yes," Margaret replied; "I have known her all my life. My stepmother is her niece, so, only fancy! Pauline and I are what?—some sort of cousins."

"Only think of that!" said Janie, a little maliciously. "Don't I envy you? Dear old Pauline! I should so love to see her."

Margaret got home late for dinner, and received a rebuke. After Janie had gone she sat on the bench thinking over all she had heard, and swallowing it as she best could.

How could Fortune, which had been so good to Pauline, play her such cruel tricks? This girl, whom she had despised and snubbed, and denounced as an impostor, preferred before her, lifted into the place she had coveted, and she thrust down! Was there ever more bitter mortification?

Denounced as an impostor! Yes; and now she suddenly remembered how offended Lady Monteith had been. How could she have known that dowdy little creature was Lady Monteith's granddaughter? Why on earth should Pauline have written to Janie all about it and not have told her, so that she might have been saved from that fatal mistake which had so greatly offended the old lady? Only, she supposed, because every circumstance was against her—always would be. So she declared to herself; but all the while she was feeling that her own unkindness to Pauline had been the bar. Pauline herself had acted with the greatest kindness to her in her great trouble, and had begged her to let her hear how she got on, but Margaret was well aware that she had resisted the feeling of gratitude, and wilfully neglected Pauline's request,

because it gratified her pride to believe that Pauline was beneath her.

And now, how were their positions reversed? Pauline by right at Monteith House, and Margaret Crawford, of her own choice, earning a miserable salary as "mother's help" in the family of an ironmonger, by dint of far harder work than she had ever supposed herself capable of doing, and receiving in return for all this hardship, not praise and encouragement, but continual fault-finding because she did not do better.

Poor, proud, unhappy Margaret, who was feeling the humiliation of her self-willed waywardness!

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGARET'S "CRUEL FATE."

MARGARET took care not to walk again in Kensington Gardens. She had no desire to meet her old schoolfellow a second time, for it would be impossible to prevent Janie from forming some notion of her connection with Mrs. Willett's children; and although she had carried out her scheme with plenty of spirit, she was as sensitive to the manner in which others might regard her position as any one who had been compelled to take such a step through the direst necessity could be.

Janie's story had roused in her an overwhelming sense of loneliness and desolation, which seemed to spread over her whole consciousness, and render every task ten times more obnoxious than she had ever found it before. How true it is that our lives are what we make them, not only in the sense of deciding the circumstances of it, but from the way we regard those circumstances when they have hedged us round. Poverty, with freedom from strife and wrangling, will seem happiness to one person, while another will see nothing but misery in the constant self-denial and absence of all that wealth can purchase. In each case the circumstances are the same; it is the difference of disposition alone that renders them either bliss or misery.

The secret of Margaret's unhappiness was that so far she had made herself the centre and ruling passion of her life. It is quite impossible for any of us—man, woman, or child—to live in close connection with others without giving up for the general good something we desire or cherish. To Margaret this giving up for the love of others had never come as a willing, pleasurable choice. Self was dearer than any other, no matter who. She had never learnt the great good of being able to rejoice in another person's gain, even when it was loss to her. How many there are like Margaret in this, only, having a less headstrong will, they conceal it better, and are saved from going to such lengths as Margaret had done.

Her present dispirited and irritable manner was not without its effect upon her young charges, who were correspondingly cross and quarrelsome. Mrs. Willett, clear-sighted and observant, soon detected the element of discord in the midst of her young people.

"I could wish, Miss Crawford, that you showed a greater interest in your occupation," she said pointedly. "Your manner has a very bad effect upon the children."

"I cannot help my manner," Margaret began; but Mrs. Willett was not accustomed to such a retort, even from such a superior-looking "mother's help" as Margaret.

"Indeed, you must help it!" she said, with great decision. "I expect every one in my house to do their very best. No doubt you find it very different from Mrs. Travers' one little child," she added kindly, seeing that Margaret was feeling unhappy about something; but if you wish to remain here, you must really try to throw yourself into your work. That is the best remedy for every sort of grief."

"I am tired of London," Margaret muttered by way of apology, for the thought of being cast adrift again, and having to beg for a home, was a terror in itself. "I shall be right again when we get into the country."

"I thought you seemed to dislike the idea the other day?" Mrs. Willett remarked inquiringly.

"I did then, but I have changed my mind since, and now I am looking forward to it," Margaret replied,

not adding that her dread of meeting Janie had wrought this change.

"I think you are very changeable," Mrs. Willett returned, not well pleased. "I am glad, at any rate, that you have changed your mind in the right direction this time. We shall have a pleasant time at Chisholm, I hope, roaming about the fields from morning till night with the children. I am going to give nurse her holiday then, for between us, I think, we shall be able to manage very well—far better than we could do without her here."

"Oh!" Margaret exclaimed dubiously, with a vision of the baby before her eyes.

"You see, I shall be so very free there," Mrs. Willett remarked, looking forward with a pleasure Margaret could not appreciate to a time when she could give herself up entirely to her children. "It is not like London; there will be no one to see what we do."

"Yes," Margaret replied abstractedly, her soul inwardly rebelling against the addition of a six-months-old infant to her other burdens, and this was about what it came to.

"Then will you take no one but me?" she ventureb to say, in a voice of remonstrance.

"No, certainly not," Mrs. Willett replied coldly. "The house will be cleaned down in our absence."

Margaret longed to say, "You are taking a mean advantage of me, and I will not stand it," but her tongue was tied. She dared not risk a quarrel with her

employer, for there loomed before her, like a hideous nightmare, the torture of being questioned, and examined, and criticised, and repudiated over and over again. So she held her tongue and chafed inwardly.

When the day arrived for their departure, and the baby was put into her arms, she took the little thing as ungraciously as might be. Mrs. Willett, who knew nothing of Margaret's history, and only suspected that she had "come down in the world," remarked, not without intending to be kind, "You must learn to submit to the disagreeables as well as the gain of your position, Miss Crawford."

"The gain?" said Margaret, with something like disdain. "I do not understand you."

"The gain," said Mrs. Willett, who was very practical, "is a home, board, lodging, laundress, and fourteen pounds a year. If it were all put into money value, it would be something like forty-five or fifty pounds."

Margaret accepted the reproof in silence, while Mrs. Willett reflected that young girls must have these things put plainly before them, and hoped that she was not giving too much for the "superior" appearance of her "nursery governess," or "mother's help."

It was, after all, as Mrs. Willett had said, no very great hardship to have to carry the little one into the meadows and set her down upon a rug to play, letting her tumble about until she was tired, and then carrying her back to sleep. Even Margaret saw that it was

folly to make a grievance of this, when she was, on the whole, kindly and considerately treated.

She was, on the whole, happier at Chisholm than she had been in London, for the life was free and easy; there was less care about washing and brushing and dressing the children neatly for walks, as in town. Lessons were suspended, and Mrs. Willett really relieved her of much responsibility. In the meadows and fields of Chisholm they were as secluded as if they had been miles away. They saw no one but an occasional farm hand or field labourer going about his or her business.

About half an hour's walk from the farm there was a lane which led direct from Chisholm to East Mere. The elder children found out that its hedgerows abounded with honeysuckle and wild rose, and were for ever begging Margaret to take them there when the baby was asleep.

Margaret, who fought shy of the lanes altogether, without suspecting this one in particular, resisted as long as the children alone urged; but when at length Mrs. Willett one evening requested her to take them, she was obliged to do so.

They were only too delighted, and scrambled up the banks, heedless of Margaret's annoyance. Johnny, the adventurous one of the family, must needs tumble into the ditch while Margaret was pacing the lane absorbed in thoughts, which the sight of the familiar banks and hedgerows roused in her mind. She had occasionally

driven along this lane with her father, though she remembered with thankfulness that he had only one patient in this out-of-the-way spot, and it was hardly likely that she should be ill just now.

For although Margaret would have been glad enough to get back to her old home, she would not for worlds have had any one who had known her in happier days see her in her self-imposed drudgery—she who had always held her head so high, and had such a contempt for every one she considered beneath her.

Who could have suspected that her friends would have been so lost to the world's opinion, as to leave her in such a position? Had she known beforehand how it would have turned out, she would have thought a second time before taking a step that was really more distasteful to herself than to any one concerned.

Such reflections as these did not prepare her to look leniently on Master Johnny's offence. She hauled him into the middle of the road, and proceeded to whisk as much of the mud as was possible off his knickerbockers and stockings with the united handkerchiefs of the family, while Johnny, partly from fright, and partly to invite consolation so as to avoid the scolding he expected, roared lustily.

In the midst of the hubbub and excitement, one of the little girls cried out, "Oh, Miss Crawford, here comes a carriage, and Johnny's such a guy! Look at his face!"

"Guy enough, to be sure," thought Margaret,

looking despairingly at the long grimy marks, where Johnny had tried to rub the mud off with his hands, and then wiped his tearful eyes with his dirty fists. None of the children were very presentable after their scramble in the hedges. Margaret cast about for an opening through which they might all get into the field. There was nothing of the kind, so she gathered her brood together, and made them walk on in an orderly fashion, trusting that the occupants of the carriage might not particularly notice them.

Supposing it should be any one who knew her? Her heart beat fitfully. As the wheels came near—she had not dared to look back—she turned to the hedge, in the pretence of seeking a better head of bloom, really to hide her face from observation.

The carriage came near, was passing her, would in another moment be well on in front, when the wheels suddenly stopped, and a voice that made her blood go tingling through her veins cried, "Margaret Crawford, you here? the last place I expected to find *you*."

There was nothing left for it but to return Lady Monteith's greeting, which she did as unconcernedly as she could, in spite of the consciousness that her five untidy charges were staring with all their eyes at the ladies.

For the carriage had other occupants than Lady Monteith. There was beside her a fair, pleasant-looking lady, not altogether unlike Lady Monteith, and seated at the back two girls: one very young, the other Margaret recognised in a moment; it was Pauline.

"Whose children are those?" Lady Monteith asked in her clear, sharp tones, while Pauline bent forward, and held out her hand in the friendliest way.

It was as useless to wish that the ground would open and swallow her up as to hope that Lady Monteith might be blinded. The old lady herself had no wish to spare Margaret, she never having forgotten the offence that Margaret had given her, and thinking it highly desirable that this insufferable girl should have a good lesson.

"Is it true," she asked, fixing her penetrating grey eyes on Margaret's downcast face, "that you are a nursemaid? When your father told me, I could not believe it, but this looks like it."

"I would rather be with children than anything else," Pauline hastily interposed, feeling sorry for Margaret. "Nursery governess is better I should think than governess pupil."

"My granddaughter is generous enough to take your part," said Lady Monteith, who was really very angry with Margaret on two scores—her bad behaviour both to her niece and grandchild. "I think your father was very wise in letting you go your own way in this matter. I had no patience with Bessie, fretting her life out over an unthankful stepchild, who had no idea of gratitude or affection. You will repent some day of your selfishness and folly, and only wish you could have over again the forbearance and gentleness you have tried too sorely."

"I have repented," Margaret began, with a lump in her throat; but in a moment she subdued the desire to cry out for pity and help, and said coldly, turning to Pauline, "I heard of you from Janie Denton; she told me everything."

"Well, I wish you joy of your choice," Lady Monteith said, giving the order to drive on: while Pauline said in a hurried whisper, "Tell me where you are living; I should like to come and have a talk with you so much."

Margaret gave the address in a half-mechanical way, while Lady Monteith waved her a cold farewell, and Pauline's mother said, in her sweet, compassionate voice, "Good-bye, my dear;" and then the carriage moved on.

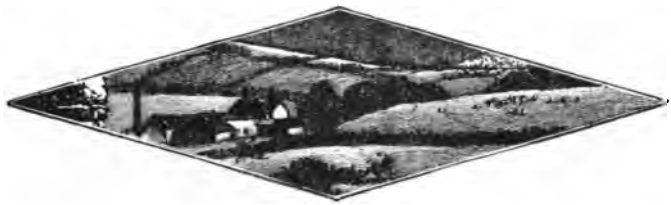
"My rival!" murmured Margaret, gazing after the retreating carriage. "She has taken my place with Lady Monteith, who used once to care for me better than any one else. Is she another enemy?"

But, as if in answer to this ungenerous thought, there seemed to rise before Margaret's eyes the vision of Pauline stealing up to her to speak words of sympathy for her grief, and again the kind desire to spare her just now. Pauline might have triumphed over her, rejoicing in the reversal of their positions; but Margaret could not help acknowledging that she was as gentle in her prosperity as she had been in her adversity.

The way home was trodden unconsciously. Mar-

garet was scarcely aware of the presence of the children till she heard a small complaining voice exclaiming, "Oh, ma! Miss Crawford is so dull."

She was roused to the necessity of an explanation of Johnny's muddiness, while Mrs. Willett's freely-spoken complaints of her want of care fell more grat-ingly than ever on ears that were filled with the sound of Lady Monteith's harsh and Pauline's kindly words.



CHAPTER XXVII.

HOME.

ON one memorable day in her life Pauline found herself, after a long railway journey, entering the tall gates which enclosed Monteith House.

"Oh, how lovely this is!" she exclaimed to her grandmamma's maid, who had been entrusted with the care of her. "How much poor grandmamma must dislike the idea of leaving it."

"Leaving it!" her companion echoed in surprise. "My lady has no thought of doing so. Only yesterday she was arranging with Mrs. Muncey about some visitors who are coming for the autumn, and perhaps the winter."

Pauline sat silent. It was a year since her grandmother had first broached the idea. Surely, Pauline thought, if she could keep on this great place for so

long, with her diminished income, she could keep it on altogether. But the whole matter seemed rather mysterious.

Lady Monteith welcomed her in a formal, yet kindly, manner. She declared Pauline to be greatly improved, and only wanting the style and ease of manner which she would very quickly acquire among well-bred people. She took her over the house and grounds, listening with pleasure to Pauline's delighted comments.

"But, grandmmama," Pauline could not help saying, "I thought you were going to leave this place?"

"I have found I need not do so," Lady Monteith replied, with a smile. "But I do not think it makes much difference to Pauline whether her grandmother is poor or rich."

"No, of course not," Pauline replied. She had lived in an atmosphere where inheritances were unthought of, and she had no idea of the jealous fear that had so long poisoned the old lady's happiness. "I should be sorry, of course, for you to lose anything you valued."

"I believe you, my dear," Lady Monteith replied. "Your mother has at least kept you free from worldliness; and you are the best proof she could have given me that your father was not seeking my money when he sought my daughter."

"Grandmamma!" Pauline exclaimed, flushing up indignantly, "you must not say such things of papa. He is as much my father as your daughter is my mother."

Lady Monteith was considerably amused, but not displeased, at Pauline's spirit.

"Ah, well!" she said, with a sigh. "You will learn some day what an inducement money is to make people forget principle and affection, and everything but the desire for it."

"I am afraid you have let it make you more unhappy than you need have done," Pauline replied, interpreting Lady Monteith's speech in her own way. "Papa, I know, would sooner starve than wish for your money, and so would mamma, and so would I. We have not been accustomed to think of money as people in England seem to do. We care for love a great deal more, I think."

Lady Monteith looked at her grandchild inquiringly. There was no mistaking the proud, sensitive quivering of the mouth, the eyes dilated with tears almost ready to fall. This could not be acting.

"I am satisfied that you speak truthfully," the old lady replied; but the old habit of thought caused her to add, "and I promise you, my dear, you shall never have any of my money: so that shall never come between us."

"Then you know you must make up for it, as we used at home, with love," Pauline said laughingly.

"I think that is a very good bargain," Lady Monteith replied, "and I give my hearty assent to it."

"I am expecting visitors; they should arrive today," Lady Monteith said the next morning. Pauline

thought there was something unusual in her grandmother's manner, and wondered who the visitors might be. If she had been less generous-minded, she would

"LADY MONTEITH LOOKED AT HER GRANDCHILD INQUIRINGLY" (p. 261).

have resented their coming, for she was anxious about her home folks, and longing to get an opportunity to talk about them.

"We will not go to meet them," said Lady Monteith

at luncheon. "I dislike meeting people on a platform; besides, I am not sure when they will arrive. You may go with Peters to get a dish of peaches, if you like. Tell him we shall want all that are ripe enough."

Pauline got a basket, and went off on her errand, satisfied that her grandmother wished to be alone. For this reason she kept out of the way until a maid came in search of her. "I am to tell you that Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton are in the drawing-room, and wish to see you miss," she said, just as she would have announced an ordinary visitor.

It was quite true. Lady Monteith had long ago arranged it, and requested that her plan might be kept a secret, her main idea in this being to test the genuineness of Pauline's love for her family. She had no time to prepare words of affection and delight. But they needed no preparing; they were engraven in Pauline's life.

Thus it came about that Mrs. Hamilton and Pauline, and her younger sister, were in Lady Monteith's carriage when it overtook Margaret.

She, poor girl, was looking forward to Pauline's visit. Anything was welcome as a change from the dreary loneliness of her life, and though at first she dreaded it, she began to long for it after a while, feeling somehow sure that the girl who had twice shown her kindness where she might justly have triumphed would not begin now to be self-righteous and overbearing.

Pauline came one day when Margaret was in the

fields with her charges. "I have been a long time," she said apologetically; "but it is difficult to get away from papa and mamma, and grandmamma and the children. I wanted to come quite alone."

They talked together a little while about indifferent subjects: school-life, Janie, and the other girls. Presently Pauline said, "I have seen Dr. Crawford and Mrs. Crawford. She is mamma's cousin, you know, so you and I are in a way relations, are we not? She is very unhappy that you should be away from home, I could tell. Why do you stay here? it must be so dull for you."

"I was unhappy at home," Margaret said, gazing down at the grass, and plucking a daisy to pieces.

"But you are not happy here, I am sure," Pauline said earnestly. "Any one can see that, Margaret; you are as altered as possible from your old self."

"Happy!" said Margaret bitterly; "I have never known what happiness is since mamma died. Every one has been against me—papa, Mrs. Crawford, Lady Monteith. I haven't a single friend."

"Don't say that," Pauline pleaded. "You know I should like you to be my friend. It was you forgot me, not I you."

Margaret knew very well that it was more than forgetfulness had separated her from Pauline, and, at any rate, Pauline had nothing to gain by such a friendship. It was the purest kindliness.

Margaret was silent for a while, busy with her own

"MARGARET COULD SAY NOTHING" (p. 267).

thoughts, bitter enough. Her eyes were opening wider and wider to all she had sacrificed in the last two years. "What do you think they would say if I were to go home?" she asked.

"We should all be so delighted!" Pauline exclaimed. "I know Mrs. Crawford would, and surely the Doctor would."

"They have every right to be angry," Margaret said.

Pauline went back from her interview with Margaret straight to Mrs. Crawford, who listened with the greatest interest to her account of Margaret.

The next day Margaret was startled by seeing her stepmother enter the garden gate. Fortunately she was alone with the two youngest children. Mrs. Crawford came in through the open door, while she sat in a sort of stupor of dread and mortification.

"Margaret, my poor, unhappy child, you look ill and worn out," Mrs. Crawford said gently. "Will you come home with me?"

Margaret could say nothing. The tears that her proud eyes so seldom shed began to rain down her face. Presently she said brokenly, "Take me away, anywhere; I am so tired of everything."

* * * * * *

Years after, when Pauline and Margaret were quite grown up, Margaret herself filled up the missing word in her mother's letter. Strangely enough she had already written the greater part of the word on that

night when she ran away from home, though she had intended to finish it very differently. She did not discover what most of us have seen for a long time, till the renewed kindness of those she had so grievously wronged taught her the cruel injustice of her suspicions.

I think every one of my readers will be able to guess the three little letters which Margaret added.

THE END.

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